

A THORN IN YOUR FLESH

by
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DEDICATION

TO MY WIFE

DAIL

A good wife who can find?

She is far more precious than jewels.
The heart of her husband trusts in her,...
She does him good, and not harm,
all the days of her life....

Strength and dignity are her clothing....
Her children rise up and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:
"Many women have done excellently,
but you surpass them all."

(Proverbs 31)

PREFACE

How should the church react to problems within its membership such as doubt or guilt? How can the church help those facing temptation or persecution? What assistance can be rendered to those who are discouraged or in pain? These are the problems this book addresses. In order to help Christians who face these problems, first there must be the proper atmosphere within the fellowship of the church. There must be an openness where one will feel the freedom to admit a problem, an action that makes one very vulnerable. There needs to be a balance between positive and negative preaching, between grace and obedience.

Many Christians need a nonthreatening situation where they can make a genuine confession of sin. A young man walked into my office one day and said, "Brother Williams, you are probably going to want to throw me out of the church, but I have to tell you something." It had taken him months to get up the courage to talk to someone about his problem. If I had rejected him in his plea, he may never have reached out for help again. Without condoning sin, we must still accept people and try to understand their problems. Otherwise the typical reaction of a person with a problem is withdrawal.

A friend of mine had two people come to him for help in getting rid of some sinful habit they each had. Both of them had been to several other preachers, and all they were told was, "Repent." They knew what they needed to do, but they needed help in breaking their bad habits. My friend did not reject them, and in time they were able to ration-

ally work out their problems and solve their difficulties. Even if our problem is not a sinful one but a trial like persecution, we need the patient, loving support of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

It is my prayer that a chapter in this book may assist you with some thorn in your flesh. All of the chapters in this book were preached as sermons at either Boone Plaza church of Christ in Frankfort, Kentucky or Robinson church of Christ in Waco, Texas. I appreciate the support and encouragement of many in these two congregations in the preparation of this material. Also I appreciate the assistance of my secretary Sharon Blankenstein in proof-reading the manuscript.

INTRODUCTION

In February 1985 Brother Steve Williams accompanied me to New Delhi, India, where he preached in a gospel meeting for the local church. On this trip we naturally had the opportunity to become better acquainted with each other.

I am especially happy Brother Williams and family plan to work more closely with our mission efforts in the future. They are also helping with our printing work by doing some typesetting.

Steve and Dail, with their two daughters, live in Waco, Texas, where he preaches for the Robinson Church of Christ. We visited them and the church there recently and enjoyed it immensely.

In addition to his work as a minister, Steve is also completing his Ph.D. at Baylor University.

From the title of this book, you recognize immediately that it deals with the controversial subject of "The Thorn in the Flesh." But regardless of what Paul's thorn was, we all have our own thorns of the mind and body, those things that are obstacles and trials in our Christian lives. Brother Williams deals with these problems and needs, and all will be benefitted by reading these inspiring chapters.

All of us need to keep in mind that where there are thorns there are also answers, solutions, and challenges related to them. We may find these, of course, in the Lord and His Word.

With these words I wish to commend the author and his book to you.

J.C. Choate
Winona, MS
Sept. 2, 1985

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Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

Ever since the early days of Christianity, Bible students have wondered about the nature of Paul's thorn in the flesh. In our scientific age of inquiry, speculation about his thorn in the flesh has not diminished. A brief examination of what his thorn in the flesh might have been can be beneficial, but not because assured results will be obtained. Such a study, though, should promote a better understanding of the nature of mankind and the essence of the scriptures.

The first problem in studying Paul's thorn in the flesh is deciding whether or not Galatians 4:12-15 and 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 tell of the same problem. The answer is not certain, but in this monograph both passages will be treated as if they were a reference to the same difficulty.¹⁾ Paul's problem, then, as defined in these two scriptures was likely a physical ailment. It was not an isolated affliction, for it recurred from time to time. Paul had prayed at least three times about his thorn in the flesh before realizing it was sent his way to keep him humble. In the case of the Galatians it was something for which they would ordinarily have scorned him. Instead they received him with respect. This means Paul's problem was not something that could be hidden or kept secret, but something which others could observe and know about.

It is very picturesque that Paul described his problem as a "thorn in the flesh" (or "thorn for the flesh"). The key word is **skolops** which is defined as "a pointed stake, thorn, or splinter."²⁾ Whether it should be translated as "stake" or "thorn" is still

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debated among scholars. Farrar tries to keep both ideas: "...impalement...by this wounding splinter."

In classical Greek **skolops** was used for a stake. Sharp, pointed stakes were placed in concealed pits or formed into palisades as a defence. They were also used as a method of torture. In later patristic Greek **skolops** was occasionally used for a cross, but this is not Paul's meaning here. In the LXX (the Septuagint or Greek translation of the Old Testament) it is used for a thorn or splinter (Num. 33:55; Ezek. 28:24; Hos. 2:6; Ecclus. 43:19). The meaning of thorn is also attested in classical and patristic sources. Several interesting occurrences are found in the papyri such as the anxious mother who writes to her son: "...he told me that you had a sore foot owing to a splinter."³) Some minor uses of the word include the point of a fish hook, a tree, a surgical instrument, a spur of a bird's leg, and a mountain peak.⁴)

Whatever the precise meaning--whether stake, thorn, or splinter--a sharp object capable of producing great discomfort and pain is intended. Stake as the meaning implies a more serious difficulty while a thorn or splinter suggests an irritation or annoyance. Since the thorn is *in* the flesh, it likely pictures an ailment that caused Paul bodily pain. The sharpness of the instrument would imply the acuteness of the pain. In preaching about Paul's thorn in the flesh, I once mentioned the theory that Paul's ailment was gallstones. This was of special interest to the audience, since one man in attendance was recovering from an operation for gallstones. After services were concluded, he said, "Preacher, if Paul's problem was gallstones, it was not a thorn in his flesh. It was a two-by-four." I then mentioned to him that the word translated thorn could also mean a stake of impalement.

There is little certainty in deciphering the

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identity of Paul's thorn in the flesh, but a survey of opinions is interesting and will be useful in understanding part of human nature and the essence of the scriptures. It is from these opinions that this book evolved. Some of the hypotheses are hysteria, neurasthenia, hypochondria, gallstones, gout, migraine headaches, rheumatism, leprosy, lice in the head, deafness, acute nervous disorders, dental infection, and an impediment of speech.⁵⁾ One pair of writers think they have the solution in a sub-arachnoid hemorrhage in the occipital lobe of the brain which then spread into the auditory receptive areas of the temporal lobe!⁶⁾

Many of the ancient Greek Christians and a few of the Latin Christians believed Paul's thorn in the flesh was suffering as a result of persecution. One writer suggested that Paul's thorn in the flesh was Alexander the coppersmith (see 2 Tim. 4:14). The term "angel" or "messenger" might denote a person. Similarly, the buffeting Paul received from this messenger of Satan might point to a person. Thus in recent writing it has been argued that the thorn was not just persecution, but a real person who was Paul's persecutor. There is contextual (2 Cor. 11:13-14; 12:10) and linguistic (Num. 33:55; Josh. 23:13; 2 Kings 14:9; Ezek. 2:6; 28:24; Mic. 7:4) evidence for this view.⁷⁾ In the Old Testament a thorn or prick in the eye stood for persecution by an enemy.

That Paul suffered much from persecution is obvious from even a cursory reading of the New Testament. From Paul's own review of persecutions in 2 Corinthians 11 it is revealed that he suffered frequent imprisonments and countless beatings; he was often near death. At least five times he received thirty-nine lashes. Three times Paul was beaten with rods. He had already been stoned once. He was in three shipwrecks and adrift at sea for a

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whole day and night. He traveled frequently and was in danger in the city, in the wilderness, and at sea. He faced peril from rivers, from the Jews, from the Gentiles, and from false brothers. Often he went without sleep, food, and water. He was exposed to the elements and cold temperatures more than once. In addition to all of this, Paul had the daily pressure of caring for the churches. If all of this was not enough, when 2 Corinthians was written Paul still had many future trials and dangers to encounter. In the great suffering Paul experienced from persecution, many have found the explanation of Paul's thorn in the flesh.

Others have suggested that Paul's thorn in the flesh was his ugly physical appearance, a physical deformity, or a handicap of some sort. Paul hinted that his personal impression was not the best when he wrote, "For they say, 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account'" (2 Cor. 10:10). Some take this to refer to a speech impediment such as stuttering, though it likely refers to his lack of oratorical skills (1 Cor. 2:1-5). In a work called the **Acts of Paul and Thecla** (c.a. A.D. 160) Paul is described as "a man little of stature, thin haired upon the head, crooked in the legs...[he had] a nose somewhat hooked..."⁸ Later and even less reliable traditions speak of Paul as round-shouldered, short, dwarfish in stature, slightly bent, pale, bald-headed, and hooknosed.⁹ Rather than being based upon fact, these descriptions may be based upon physiognomic considerations, that is the art of estimating one's character from the features of the face or the body. An interesting tradition which might have been the source for this description of Paul is a popular passage from the poet Archilochus who was very popular in early Christian times. His description of a general ran as follows: "I love not a tall general nor

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one long-shanked, nor with splendid curls or partly sheared. Let me have one who is short and bow-legged, firm on his feet, full of heart."¹⁰) If this well-known poetic description lies behind the **Acts of Paul and Thecla**, then that document is attempting to portray Paul, the Christian soldier who loved military metaphors so much, as a leader with the qualities of a general. On the other hand, these traditions may preserve a kernel of truth. Whatever the case, some have identified Paul's thorn in the flesh with a physical handicap of some sort.

A very common theory, the dominant one of the Roman Catholic Church, is that Paul's thorn in the flesh was impure temptation to sensuality. Evidence for this theory is seen in Paul being unmarried. Likely, though, this opinion arose because of the Vulgate's rendering of "thorn in the flesh" as **stimulus carnis** ("spur of the flesh"). This Latin phrase was taken by many to mean temptations of the flesh to licentiousness, especially as a knowledge of Greek became less widespread in the West.¹¹) Such an opinion would be popular, since monasticism was on the rise during the Middle Ages. Monks and ascetics who attempted to conquer their bodily desires by withdrawal often found that the desire for sex was the last one to be conquered. Even after baths of cold water, some of them would still see the dancing girls of Rome in their minds. In their own torment they could find comfort in believing that the great apostle Paul had the same problem. Luther rejected this view and Calvin said it was ridiculous. More importantly, however, this hypothesis is based upon the Latin text rather than the Greek original.

Rather than impure temptations of the flesh, spiritual temptations have also been identified with Paul's thorn in the flesh. Calvin and others said the thorn was Paul's temptation to doubt and fall into

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despair, shirking his duties. As with the previous hypothesis, it is evident that Bible students are prone to transpose their own problems or conflicts upon the passage and assume that Paul's thorn was the same as their own.

Another interesting, but unlikely, explanation is that Paul's thorn was his great sorrow over unconverted Jews. In Romans 9:1-3 Paul went so far as to say, "I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race. Such an ailment was not physical, though, and would not bring Paul public scorn from the Galatians.

Others have theorized that Paul's problem was guilt and bad memories from his earlier days as a persecutor of the church. Maybe he could not forget the faces of some of the innocent Christians whom he had taken into custody. Maybe he could not forget Stephen. Maybe Paul was haunted by the memory of some woman made a widow or a child made an orphan due to the arrests he had made. Because of his persecution of the church Paul called himself the "foremost of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15) and "the least of the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:9). There is little validity to this proposal as will be noted later.

Delving into the personality of Paul, some say his thorn in the flesh was a defect in character such as an uncontrollable temper.¹² Before the high priest Paul lashed out against the injustice of his trial saying, "God shall strike you, you whitewashed wall!" (Acts 23:3). Paul did redeem himself with an immediate apology, but he could boil over easily. Before his conversion Paul was apparently very vicious in his opposition to the church (Acts 9:1-2). Later when he was opposed by the magician Elymas,

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Paul used extremely harsh words: "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?" (Acts 13:10). Elymas was then struck blind. When Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement over taking John Mark on a missionary journey, there was such a sharp contention that the two were separated (Acts 15:36-41).

Because of the difficulty the church at Corinth had given him, Paul might be especially prone to lose his temper. Paul had delayed his journey to Corinth to spare the Corinthians (2 Cor. 1:23). Was he also afraid he would be so upset with their sin and rebellion that he would lose his temper? Could such be part of the humbling that Paul feared upon coming to Corinth too soon (2 Cor. 12:21)? Having an uncontrollable temper would be a trait that could keep Paul humble. It might cause the Galatians to want to scorn him. It would be a thorn that Paul would certainly want to remove. Furthermore, throughout the ages, subjugation of the temper has been very difficult for many servants of God.

Ramsay's contention that Paul's thorn in the flesh was recurrent malaria has gained much favor. In Galatians 4:13 Paul reminded the Galatians that "it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first." It is theorized that Paul hurried from Pamphylia to Antioch of Pisidia because he had malaria and needed to go to the highlands for relief (Acts 13:13-14). Malaria was common in the lowlands of Pamphylia. There must be some explanation of why Paul did not stay and preach in Pamphylia, for it was a heavily populated area. It is possible, then, that malaria caused him to leave the area quickly and go to the highlands of Galatia.

Malaria sometimes returns periodically and is ac-

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accompanied by violent headaches. The feeling has been described as one of a hot iron being driven through the temple, possibly the origin of the metaphor "a thorn in the flesh." Furthermore, some early writers such as Tertullian and Jerome believed that Paul's thorn in the flesh was violent and prostrating headaches. Would people be prone to scorn Paul publically for having malaria, though? Can malaria be connected with any sort of superstition among the Galatian people? Yes, some viewed malaria as being caused by demon possession or as being a penalty from a direct visitation of God.¹³ The Galatians might have rejected Paul as one cursed by God, but instead they received him "as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus" (Gal. 4:14).

Another widespread theory is that Paul's thorn was a severe eye problem, one which many assume can be traced back to the bright light Paul saw on the road to Damascus and his subsequent temporary blindness. Paul had reminded the Galatians that "if possible you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me" (Gal. 4:15). Did Paul mean this literally or metaphorically? If he meant it in any literal sense other than as a symbol for a very important body organ, then it would point to an eye problem.

Paul often used secretaries or stenographers (amanuenses) to write his letters; but this was a common practice, even with those who had good eyesight.¹⁴ In Galatians 6:11 Paul closed a letter by writing, "See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand." Did he write in large letters for emphasis like John Hancock, or did he do it because of bad eyesight? Did Paul fail to recognize the high priest in Acts 23:1-5 because of bad eyesight? Is bad eyesight why Paul desired the constant presence of others to minister to him? In light of such evidence one should still remember that Paul's

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problem would normally have caused the Galatians to ridicule him. Would they do this because of bad eyesight?

One very intriguing suggestion is that Paul's thorn in the flesh was epilepsy or some other sort of disorder that caused convulsions and was looked upon by people with suspicion. In Galatians 4:14 Paul wrote, "Though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus." The word for "rejected" or "despised" literally meant to spit out as a gesture of disdain to ward off evil or demonic spirits or the illness they were believed to cause.¹⁵ The ancient custom was to spit toward someone who was sick in order to ward off evil spirits, thus avoiding the illness. This was especially true when someone had epilepsy.

Though some well known men in history such as Julius Caesar, Mohammed, Augustine, Napoleon I, Pascal, and Dostoevsky may have had epilepsy, much superstition has surrounded this disease even down to our present day. Because of this superstitious attitude toward the illness, epilepsy would fit Galatians 4:12-15 very well. The Galatians would normally have scorned Paul, but they refrained from doing so. Epilepsy would have caused Paul public embarrassment, since it is not a sickness that he could keep secret. It could have served to keep him humble. Epilepsy can cause eye afflictions which would add the further weight of the ophthalmia theory.

In a special note on Paul's infirmity in the flesh, J. B. Lightfoot has given evidence in favor of this view.¹⁶ He compares the description of Paul's problem to a description of King Alfred's problem which apparently was epilepsy. Some of the parallels in language seem unintentional and are very interesting. Ramsay warns that this theory can lead to dis-

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crediting Paul's visions if they are associated with epileptic seizures.¹⁷ Any similarity between seizures and Paul's visions, though, do not necessarily impeach Paul's credibility. Such similarity might well serve the purpose of keeping Paul humble.

It should be clear that a dogmatic stance on the identity of Paul's thorn in the flesh is not possible. As Philip Hughes has written, "We do not propose to swell the number of conjectures concerning the precise nature of Paul's 'thorn in the flesh.' The great diversity of solutions which have been offered from the early centuries onward is sufficient warning to those who may think that they have answered the problem--not, of course, that we regard the formulation of conjecture as illegitimate; but we do feel that in this instance history has proved that no amount of induction, however ingenious, is going to dispel the uncertainty with which the subject is enveloped."¹⁸

There is a lesson in a study like this. A historical survey demonstrates that through the centuries interpreters often identify their particular problem with Paul's thorn in the flesh. Many imagine, rightly or wrongly, that their problem is what Paul suffered. Those in the early centuries who faced persecution often suggested that Paul's thorn was persecution. Monks who had to battle with impure temptations of the flesh, especially sexual temptations, could conclude that this was Paul's affliction. Some preachers, maybe reflecting their own struggles, have suggested that Paul's thorn was depression, distress, and the temptation to doubt and quit. Many with physical afflictions and illnesses have found comfort in Paul's thorn in the flesh and his attitude toward it, assuming all the time that his thorn was similar to theirs.

Uncertainty over Paul's thorn in the flesh is a blessing in some ways. Philip Hughes asks, "Is there

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a single servant of Christ who cannot point to some 'thorn in the flesh', visible or private, physical or psychological, from which he has prayed to be released, but which has been given him by God to keep him humble, and therefore fruitful in His service?...Every believer must learn that human weakness and divine grace go hand in hand together. Hence Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' is, by its very lack of definition, a type of every Christian's 'thorn in the flesh', not with regard to externals, but by its spiritual significance."**19)**

The wisdom of God is manifest in allowing the scriptures to be silent on certain topics. Paul's "silence concerning such symptoms as would have enabled a diagnosis to be made may have been a cause of exasperation to some curious souls. But we are convinced that this silence was in accordance with the mind of God and that therefore, as we shall endeavour to show, it is, and has always been, of more benefit to the Church to remain in ignorance on this matter than would have been the case had the nature of the affliction been fully known. Let us suppose that Paul had supplied specific details regarding his 'thorn in the flesh', and that, for the sake of argument, it was some particular form of epilepsy; then subsequent generations of Christians, the great majority of whom have been free from this complaint, would have been inclined to dismiss the Apostle's problem as one remote from the reality of their own experience."**20)**

As it is, anyone can say to himself, "My problem and affliction is probably something like Paul's. God sustained Paul, even though he did not remove the problem after Paul prayed three times. God, then, can sustain me in my difficulty if I will but trust in him." In this manner everyone can turn to 2 Corinthians 12:9 and apply the words found there to his own life: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my

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power is made perfect in weakness that the power of Christ might rest upon me."

In failing to tell the nature of his thorn in the flesh, Paul displayed what Sir Thomas Browne called "the virtue of taciturnity."²¹) It was this virtue that William Osler used to commend to his medical students. He said life had enough problems without people unnecessarily darkening it by complaints from people about illnesses which are unavoidable. While addressing a group of graduating nurses, he warned them against dwelling upon talk about disease and gruesome medical cases for entertainment. He then quoted George Sands about the attitude current in an earlier day: "People knew how to live and die in those days, and kept their infirmities out of sight. You might have the gout, but you must walk all the same, without making grimaces. It was a point of good breeding to hide one's sufferings."²²) Whether it was Paul's taciturnity, the prevalent custom of the day, or the providence of God, there is a blessing in disguise in the mystery surrounding his thorn in the flesh.

In the following chapters are discussions of different "thorns" that people today must face, each of them a suggested thorn for Paul. Though few of them harmonize with Paul's description of his thorn in the flesh, they provide starting points for discussions of different problems encountered today. It is the sincere hope of the writer that one of these discussions will help you face a difficulty and find some comfort and strength.

The Thorn of Doubt

"O man of little faith, why did you doubt?"

-- Matthew 14:31

"...do not be faithless, but believing."

-- John 20:27

It has been suggested by some that Paul's thorn in the flesh was the temptation to doubt and shirk his duties. It is extremely unlikely that doubt was his thorn in the flesh. Paul believed, not just because of reliable testimony, but because he had experienced a personal confrontation with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. It was Paul, who wrote, "I know whom I have believed and I am sure that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me" (2 Tim. 1:12).

For many religious people, though, doubt is a terrible thorn in the flesh. This nagging feeling within your heart can slowly torment you and drive you to guilt and despair. Well did Henry Burke Robins put it:

Better a day of faith

Than a thousand years of doubt!

Many, because of their doubts, feel hypocritical in continuing in worship and service. Others, not wanting to feel hypocritical, give up before they have given themselves adequate time for their doubts to be resolved.

In trying to cope with doubts about the validity of the Christian faith, about the inspiration of the

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Bible, about the nature of Jesus Christ, or whatever, you should begin by first reminding yourself that doubt is a very common experience. Martin Luther is supposed to have asked, "Who has not known the awakening of a Monday morning covered by that black blanket of ultimate doubt?" In Christian literature references to doubt are frequent. In the Bible more than one character had periods of doubt. So before you go too far into the valley of the shadow of doubt, you should remember that doubt is not uncommon.

Over the centuries men have often handled doubt by trying to make a virtue of it. This is a common reaction. If you are plagued by some problem and can not rid yourself of it, then one alternative is to make this problem into a virtue in your own thinking. Read through this wide variety of quotes and notice how men have often attempted to make a virtue out of doubt:

"Who never doubted never half believed:
Where doubt is, there truth is,--'tis her shadow."
--P. J. Bailey

"By doubting we come at the truth."
--Cicero

"Doubt is the beginning, not the end, of wisdom."
--George Iles

"The road to resolution lies by doubt."
--Francis Quarles

"There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds."
--Tennyson

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"To believe with certainty we must begin with doubting."

--Stanislaus

"A skeptic is not one who doubts, but one who examines."

--Sainte-Beauve

"How prone to doubt, how cautious are the wise!"

--Homer

"An honest man can never surrender an honest doubt."

--Walter Malone

"I say unto you: Cherish your doubts,
For doubt is the handmaiden of truth.
Doubt is the servant of discovery;
She is the key unto the door of knowledge.

Let no man fear for the truth, that doubt may
consume her;

Only he that would shut out his doubts denieth
the truth."

--Robert Weston

There is certainly some truth in these affirmations. Doubt can lead to truth, since it may spark inquiry. Inquiry, investigation, research, and curiosity are all to be admired. Without them everyone would have a closed mind and advances in knowledge and virtues would mostly cease. There is something about the dogmatic, closed-mind attitude that upsets others. The kind of attitude that says, "If God had intended for man to fly, he would have given him wings," is the disposition that never leads to progress.

Once this value of doubt has been affirmed, though, a word of caution is in order. Doubt in and

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of itself is not a virtue. Unresolved doubt can lead to drastic consequences, while resolved doubt can lead to good results. As Jack Exum explains, "Doubt is neither right nor wrong--good or evil--truth or error. While it holds great power for right or wrong, good or evil, truth or error, within itself it is none of these things. It is uneasy, unsure, unsettled."¹

The ideal in the New Testament is faith, not doubt. Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and never doubt (**diakrino**)..." (Mt. 21:21). Abraham is a good example because he did not doubt: "No distrust (**diakrino**) made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God" (Rom. 4:20). In discussing prayer James said, "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting (**diakrino**), for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind" (Jas. 1:6).

Some of those who attempt to glorify doubt point in response to the inherited faith many in the church hold. Two wrongs do not make one right, as we have all heard. For someone to be raised in the church and accept their parents' faith without ever examining the evidence for themselves is not commendable. We should, as Peter commanded, "Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15). We should "test everything" (1 Thess. 5:21).² Like the Bereans we should be in the habit of "examining the scriptures daily to see if these things" are so (Acts 17:11). Christians who hold to an inherited faith are not to be praised for this. Furthermore, this should not be seen as any kind of justification of the opposite extreme of doubting everything.

While laziness of mind on the part of some is wrong, an overly skeptical mind prone to rebellion is also wrong. Some who doubt have not been fair to

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themselves or the evidence. As Jack Paul explained, "Many a person, however, who had doubts has them because of lack of information or misinformation. There are many on the outside of the church who sneer at Christians in a supercilious way, as though they were a group of dolts and dullards and intellectually backward people who could believe all of this archaic nonsense that is in the Bible.

"Many a person who says, 'I don't believe the Bible,' has never read it. Many a person who says, 'You can't expect me to believe the ideas of the church,' has no idea what the church expects him to believe. And the tragedy of our times is that many a person is rejecting Christianity not because of what it is, but because of a misconception that he has as to what it is."³) Some find it easier to doubt than to go through the struggle of examining.

The Bible never recommends the attitude, "Believe, but do not bother to examine the evidence." Such a position is unscriptural and will only serve to discredit the Christian faith with thoughtful and intelligent people. One good example of this is the case of doubt in John the Baptist. The Bible tells us, "Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?'" (Mt. 11:2-3). Such a statement is hard for many to understand. This is the same John who baptized Jesus only after protesting at first to him, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" (Mt. 3:14). This is the same John who had formerly said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" when Jesus was approaching (Jn. 1:29).

In light of this difficulty, many have tried to see in John's words something other than doubt. Some say he did not really doubt, but he was only trying to urge and prompt Jesus to hurry along with the

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establishment of the kingdom and rescue him from jail. Other interpretations have been placed upon John's words, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" It seems best, though, to see in his statement simply the doubt of a man who is in despair in prison.

The important lesson here is found in the response of Jesus. He replied to John's disciples, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offense at me" (Mt. 11:4-6). Jesus did not rebuke John's doubt for he knew it was honest and sincere doubt.

"How did Jesus react to the doubtings of John?", Jack Exum asks. "Did he ridicule, mock or laugh? Did He accuse John of losing his faith or his sanity under the strain of prison life? Perhaps Jesus whispered to the messengers and sent them out the back door. No, Jesus did none of these, but to the contrary says in effect, 'If you doubt Me, come to Me'. After all, who could be more weary than the heart troubled with questions and filled with contradictions. Examine Christ, His life, and His word.... Come to the very One around whom your questions are centered."⁴⁾

Examine the evidence. Search the scriptures. As Clark Pinnock explains, "Faith is not the opposite of knowledge. The scandal of the gospel is not its alleged immunity from proof. The gospel makes sense, not non-sense. Its offense lies in its moral unmasking of the sinner, not in its supposed uncertain truthfulness. The mind is not to be left at the threshold in Christianity."⁵⁾

If you have not examined the historical foundations of Christianity, then you have no right to doubt. If you do examine the evidence, most likely

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you will say with Jack Paul, "You say it is hard to believe the Christian interpretation. I say it is far easier to believe it than to believe the atheist interpretation." As an illustration he discusses creation. "For instance, I believe in the Christian interpretation and understanding of the origin of the universe as given in the Bible. But the atheist has a belief at that point, too. He says, 'I believe that all that exists, all the cosmos, is a result of sheer chance. It all just happened. No plan behind anything, no purpose.' You can look at it and see all the order, and beauty, and it all has no meaning, only apparent meaning. But I can't believe that; I'm not gullible enough to believe that."⁶)

Some, though, have examined the evidence and they still have doubts. These cases are harder to deal with than the former type. Often nothing can be done to convince such a person of the truth, for they are blinded by their own will and desire not to believe. Maybe it is for a desire to appear worldly wise, or for a multitude of other reasons, but the evidence will not convince everyone. This truth has been expressed well in a poem:

"Show me your God!" the doubter cries.
I point him to the smiling skies;
I show him all the woodland greens;
I show him peaceful sylvan scenes;
I show him winter snows and frost;
I show him waters tempest-tossed;
I show him hills rock-ribbed and strong;
I bid him hear the thrush's song;
I show him flowers in the close--
The lily, violet and rose;
I show him rivers, babbling streams;
I show him youthful hopes and dreams;
I show him maids with eager hearts;
I show him toilers in the marts;

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I show him stars, the moon, the sun;
I show him deeds of kindness done;
I show him joy; I show him care,
And still he holds his doubting air,
And faithless goes his way, for he
Is blind of soul, and cannot see!7)

If one examines the evidence for the Christian faith fairly and honestly, he can remove his doubts and replace them with a strong faith. Faith does not have to be intermingled with doubts. Faith in the Bible sense of the term encompasses an element of knowledge and assurance. For example, as one man was dying, he was asked about his speculations concerning the soul and death. "Speculations!" the dying man exclaimed. "I know nothing about speculations; I'm resting on certainties." He could say this, because faith is not to be divorced from knowledge. Faith is a trust in the reliable testimony of God who does not and can not lie (Rom. 10:17; Jn. 20:30-31; 2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:1, 3, 7). Could we ask for anything more certain?

More could be said, but this is not the place for a survey of Christian evidences. If you are troubled with doubt, do some reading in Christian evidences. Your minister or local bookstore can make some suggestions for good reading. A professor once told me that a very common habit among young ministers is to preach on Christian evidences, but as they grow older they tend to do less and less of such preaching. The reason is that preachers have a tendency to sometimes preach from their own problems. If a preacher is troubled with doubts, he will read more in the field of Christian evidences and thus preach more on this theme. Usually after a few years of such studies, though, he has been convinced and his faith strengthened. He then turns more to other areas of thought.

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This was true in the author's own life. I used to love to teach classes or preach on prophecy, archeology, or some similar theme as an evidence of Christianity. Now I preach less and less on these themes. It is not because such studies were frustrating--quite to the contrary. The point is this--if you have doubts, do not ignore them. Do not be afraid of asking for help with your doubts. Remember that even a doubting Thomas could be quickly changed into a worshipping disciple who cried out, "My Lord and my God!" (Jn. 20:28).

When (God knows) I'm tost about,
Either with despair or doubt;
Yet before the glass be out,
Sweet Spirit comfort me!**8)**

The Thorn of Temptation

"Many men have too much will power. It's won't power they lack."

-- John A. Shedd

"It is easier to stay out than get out."

-- Mark Twain

According to some, Paul's thorn in the flesh was temptation with which he had to wage a mighty struggle. The identification of temptation with Paul's thorn in the flesh was especially appealing to those who had to struggle with temptations of the flesh and of a sexual nature. It is very unlikely that this was Paul's problem, because Paul gave this advice to those who suffered from temptations of the flesh: "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do. But if they cannot exercise self-control they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion" (1 Cor. 7:8-9).

Paul says marriage is better than "burning" (KJV). The original word can mean "to burn" (literally), but it is used metaphorically very often for being aflame with sexual desire and passion. That is the meaning here. Paul only made such commands "in view of the impending distress" (1 Cor. 7:26), so his instructions should be interpreted within a setting of some crisis situation such as persecution. Nevertheless, if Paul's thorn in the flesh had been sexual temptation, it is likely that he would have followed his own advice and gotten married. Evidently being unmarried was not a "burning"

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problem for Paul, for he was able to say, "I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another" (1 Cor. 7:7).

Others contend that Paul's thorn was a different type of temptation. Appeals are made to scriptures such as Romans 7:13-25 in order to identify his thorn with temptation to sin in general. Certainly Paul did have to face temptation of many types, but this was probably not his thorn in the flesh. Temptation is a thorn in the flesh for many people today, though.

Temptations come to every person at one time or another. Martin Luther said temptations are like birds flying overhead. You may not be able to stop them from flying overhead, but you can keep them from making nests in your hair. This is easier said than done. The enticements of sin are very strong and make their appeal from every possible angle.

"As Origen pointed out (**On Prayer** 29. 5) the Septuagint [Greek] version of Job 7:1 can be translated: 'Is not man's life on earth one continuous temptation?' Origen goes on: 'Has anyone ever thought man to be beyond temptations of which he was aware from the day he attained to reason? Is there any time when a man is sure that he has not to struggle against sinning?'"

Nelson Bell told of this when he wrote, "We are living in a permissive society, in a time when much that is evil goes unchallenged. It is not easy to go against current mores and to stand up and say no when one is convinced that something is contrary to the holy will of God. But exactly that is necessary. ...Our Lord tells us, 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself (say no to self) and take up his cross and follow me' (Matt. 16:24)--and that is not easy! All of us face the seemingly overwhelming temptation to trim our sails in these days

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of permissive living. When temptation comes, it is so much easier to compromise a little to avoid criticism or even reprisals. . . .

"God does not call Christians to live as hermits in a sin-dominated social order. But he offers the means whereby they can act as salt in a putrefying society and lights in the midst of spiritual darkness. This requires the positive witness of a committed spirit and the equally positive witness of an unswerving rejection of any compromise with evil."²

When Jesus prayed for us, he did not pray that we should be removed from the world with all of its temptations. Instead he prayed, "I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one" (Jn. 17:15). The Christian should not think it unusual that temptations will come his way. Becoming a Christian will result in God removing all of the guilt of sin from our lives, but it will not result in God removing temptations.

Ronald Rife in an article entitled "What to do About Thorns" explains that most Christians face the same temptations after their conversion as they did before. Basing his ideas upon 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, he writes, "Paul said that some of the Christians had formerly been drunkards. Are we to think that after they became believers in Christ they no longer were tempted by alcoholic beverages? Anyone who has seen a former alcoholic come to Christ knows this is not so. The temptation is likely to remain, at times very difficult to bear, often requiring resistance to the end of his life on earth. For some it is a thorn in the flesh that God does not remove.

"Some of the Corinthian Christians had formerly been adulterers. Now they had been put right with God through Jesus Christ. But the temptation of lust does not disappear as if by magic. It still remains strongly implanted in many Christians, and becomes

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their thorn in the flesh.

"In the past few years five ministers among my own acquaintances have become intimately involved with their secretaries or other women in their churches. Did this suddenly just happen? Or was it the result of some long-hidden thorn that the person could no longer restrain by himself? I incline toward the latter view.

"Another type of person who became a Christian in Corinth was the thief. Undoubtedly several of these people had formerly made their living by stealing items and selling them in the thieves' market in the city. On becoming Christians they had to find a new means of livelihood. But being cleansed from sin through Jesus Christ did not mean they were no longer tempted by the lure of easy money. The temptation may have remained and become to these persons a thorn in the flesh. To the end of their days, perhaps when they saw some object of value lying unprotected, they had to fight the temptation to pick it up and carry it off. Although the temptation may have weakened as the years passed, it may have remained a hindrance in their spiritual lives.

"A fourth type of person mentioned by the Apostle has been the object of a great deal of study recently. Paul noted that although some of the members of Christ's body at Corinth had formerly been homosexuals, they had now been cleansed from sin, dedicated to God, and put right with God through Jesus Christ. A homosexual who becomes redeemed cannot continue to remain homosexual in his or her behavior, because practicing homosexuals cannot have any part in God's kingdom. The sexual behavior must change.

"...The Christian who has been a homosexual will probably continue to have homosexual temptations, perhaps severely so. It is likely to be his thorn in

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the flesh. But temptation is not a sin. The sin is in succumbing to the temptation. It is no more of a sin for a former homosexual to be tempted with a homosexual urge than for a former alcoholic to be tempted to drunkenness. But to yield to the temptation would indeed be sin."³⁾

The person who thinks becoming a Christian will be an easy, almost magical cure-all for sin and temptation will be sadly disappointed. The Christian life will bring even more temptations of a different type not experienced before such as the temptation to shirk one's allegiance to Christ.

To better understand the presence of temptation in the world, remember that it is here as a necessity. If man had no temptation to do wrong, he would have no free will. He would be a mere robot. Since man has a free will, he has the temptation to do wrong and to do right. God allows this decision to exist in the world for through such decisions men can be made into children of God.

Temptation, if handled properly, will result in a person growing stronger before the Lord. James said, "Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness....Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him" (Jas. 1:2-3, 12-13). As John Quincy Adams once said, "Every temptation is an opportunity of our getting nearer to God."

Many people are confused about the origin of temptation and God's role in the process of temptation. Can a man blame God for his own failings by saying, "The Lord allowed me to be tempted. God put this temptation before me. How can I fight God?" Norman Hope tells that "For nineteen years, between 1927 and 1946, Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick conducted a nationwide program entitled 'National

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Vespers.' Each year he received 100,000 letters from members of his vast audience, many of them telling about their religious difficulties. On the basis of that experience he had this to say: 'No verse in the Bible puzzles more people than the petition in the Lord's Prayer 'Lead us not into temptation.' 'Is it not a shocking idea,' many say, 'that God leads men into temptation and that we must beg him to stop doing it?'"(4)

In what sense is God involved in the temptation process? Can a person blame God for temptation? At first there seems to be a contradiction in the Bible for James says, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death" (Jas. 1:13-15).

Although much could be said about this problem, most of the solution lies in the meaning of the word "tempt." This word's connotation today is usually bad. To most people it means "entice one to do evil." The Greek words that "tempt" is translated from, however, do not always have a bad connotation. Sometimes they mean "test," "try," or some such similar idea. For example, when a teacher gives students a test in class, it is not done in hopes that the students will do poorly and fail. The test is a device to encourage the students to study and thereby help them grow intellectually. Likewise, God tests us to enable us to grow. This is the reason that modern translations are wisely using the word "test," "try," or "ordeal" in many instances where the earlier translations had the word "tempt."

The origin of temptation is with Satan, not with God. Satan sometimes even disguises himself as an angel of light in order to seduce man. At other

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times Satan approaches us through friends or loved ones. Remember Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me Satan" (Mt. 16:23). We can not always blame others or the devil by saying, "The devil made me do it," though, for James shows that temptation really begins in the heart of man. Satan can only come into our heart when the door has been unlocked from the inside.⁵⁾

Many other facets of temptation could be discussed, but the important question is, "How do I endure, defeat, and conquer temptation?" If a lot of time is spent tracing the origin of temptation but the cure of it is never learned, little has been accomplished. For example, imagine a man in a building that is almost totally engulfed in flames. He is trapped except for the one hope of jumping from a window into the firemen's net below. Would this man stand at the edge of the window and say, "How did the fire get started? I will not jump until I know how the fire got started." No, he would jump and ask such questions later. Likewise, we must not spend too much time on the origin of temptation without addressing the important issue of how it can be endured? The following fourteen points should help you in enduring whatever temptation may come your way.

1. Fear God. This may sound simple or naive, but the Bible teaches that a fear of the Lord will help you in times of temptation: "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death" (Prov. 14:27). Fear of the Lord due to the punishment he administers for sin and fear (respect) for him because of his holiness help you to be able to meet temptation.

2. Think of those you love. Quite often people have been able to endure temptation by thinking of those they love. A man thinks of how his sin would hurt his wife. A child thinks of how his sin would

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hurt his mother or father. A Christian thinks of how his sin would hurt the church's reputation and the tender heart of God himself. This will always help you in the hour of trial.

3. Beware of evil companions. The story is often told of Augustine who after trying to live the Christian life saw a former mistress on the street one day. Immediately he turned and went in the other direction. She cried out, "Augustine, it is I." "Yes," he replied, "but it is not I." He was trying to be a different person. He avoided temptation by avoiding friends who would influence him toward wrong.

As far back as Exodus 34:12 God warned about the corrupting influence other people could have on God's people. He warned, "Take heed to yourself lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither you go, lest it become a snare in the midst of you." The children of Israel only partially heeded that warning, and many times in later centuries they paid dearly because of the corrupting influence of the other nations.

Solomon is a clear example of one who allowed himself to be tempted by others: "Now King Solomon loved many foreign women...from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, 'You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods'" (1 Kings 11:1-2). The Bible then repeatedly emphasizes why Solomon fell: "...his wives turned away his heart. For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God (1 Kings 11:3-4).

Paul expressed it best when he wrote, "Bad company ruins good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33), no matter whom he was quoting. Or as another ancient

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put it, "Alas for the ill-luck in mortals that brings the honest man into company with those who have less regard for religion. In every matter, indeed, nothing is worse than evil-fellowship."**6**) If you are not strong enough to withstand temptations that friends may place before you, you would be better off to sever those relationships, if possible.

4. Watch and pray. Jesus on the night of his betrayal told his disciples, "Watch [keep awake] and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mt. 26:41). In similar fashion Peter wrote, "Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

5. Realize the offer temptation makes is false. Temptation is always very appealing if we think only of the moment. D. G. Kehl explains the appeal the devil makes to us by comparing it with the third temptation of our Lord. "This third temptation was also a bargain special. Hear the old huckster: 'Get all the kingdoms of the world at a special reduced price, a sensational unheard-of bargain! Why wait and pay the more expensive price at Calvary? Take advantage of this special offer!' The same copy-writer offered a 'special' on fruit to Eve, on 'Wonderbread' to Christ, and on lentil soup to Esau. Before Esau sold his birthright, he bought the 'bargain,' a mess of pottage--and he paid dearly for it. Grabbing for all the gusto he could get, Esau sacrificed his future on the altar of the pleasing present. The salespitch was 'Buy now, pay later,' and pay he did. It was not an 'easy payment plan,' for the way of the transgressor is hard; sin, when it is finished, brings forth death (Jas. 1:15). When 'later' came, Esau 'found no place of repentance though he sought it carefully with tears' (Heb. 12:17)."**7**) Always remember that the "wages of sin is death"

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(Rom. 6:23), and then you can better face temptation.

6. Realize that God offers better rewards. Satan often tempts you and appeals to you through legitimate needs and desires, so that you often wonder, "What could be wrong with this?" Satan, however, never really fulfills man's needs and desires. After a brief, or lengthy, indulgence in sin, inner peace and harmony are still missing.

D. G. Kehl explains how Satan operates in this regard: "The subtlety of the devil's promises lies in the fact that they are directed toward pseudo-fulfillment of legitimate, God-ordained needs and desires; they function as counterfeits of divine promises of fulfillment. Accordingly, Satan advertises the superficial but attractive 'pleasures of sin for a season' (Heb. 11:25); God offers fullness of joy and pleasures at his right hand for evermore (Ps. 16:11). Satan hawks cheap thrills, temporary euphoria, sensual titillation; God offers peace that passes all understanding (Phil. 4:7). Satan peddles earthly fame, the vain plaudits of a fickle crowd; God offers a crown of glory that does not fade (1 Pet. 5:4). Satan solicits man with treasures upon earth, where moth and rust corrupt and where thieves break through and steal (Matt. 6:19); God offers incorruptible treasures in heaven and treasure in these 'earthen vessels' now (2 Cor. 4:7)." **(8)**

Earthly-oriented temptations will not bother you as much when you realize that such treasures offered by Satan are worthless in comparison to spiritual blessings. To fight temptation you should always keep foremost in your mind this passage of scripture: "For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life" (Mt. 16:26). The devil made Jesus some wonderful, worldly offers (Mt. 4:8), but Jesus chose righteousness.

7. Live a selfless life of sacrifice after the pat-

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tern of Jesus Christ. At first it may seem that this suggestion will render little aid and comfort in facing temptation. The practice of living a life of sacrifice, though, can be one of the greatest barriers to keep you from falling under the power of temptation once you realize the nature of temptation. Temptation appeals to pride and selfishness in an individual. The devil encourages you to live for yourself. Jesus, however, demands that you live for others.

D. G. Kehl explains these two contrasting appeals: "Basic to both Satanic and commercial solicitation is the appeal to self-indulgence. The sales-pitch Eve fell for was 'Try it; you'll like it.' Our progenitors were literally dying to try it. Adam and Eve bought the notion that 'you only go around once in life, so you have to grab for all the gusto you can get,' and the grabbing has continued to this day. The rich farmer in Luke 12 spoke to his soul in the language of modern advertising copy, 'Take thine ease--eat, drink and be merry'; but in God's sight he was a fool ripe for judgment. The devil's appeal has always been 'indulge yourself'; God's is 'Deny yourself' (Matt. 16:24). The devil says 'Live a little'; God says 'Die a little' (John 12:24)."9

The effect should be obvious. The more you learn to sacrifice yourself for others, the less Satan's appeal to self-indulgence and selfishness will bother you. You will slowly become immune to such temptations.

8. Fill your life with good things. "One big help in the struggle against temptation," writes Norman V. Hope, "is to fill mind and heart and life with things that are pure, true, lovely, and of good report. Let a man's life be systematically filled with such earthly interests and he will be able to overcome many temptations to which he might otherwise yield. Dr. Frank W. Boreham tells of a certain small

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town whose governing body decided to have a canal running down its central street. The bed was dug and the water allowed to flow, and the city fathers thought that they now had their canal. But soon a fungoid weed began to grow profusely in the canal bed, preventing the passage of boats. All sorts of remedies were suggested. Acid was poured in; but the weed, after disappearing for a time, began to grow again more thickly than ever. The attempt was made to hack at the weed and uproot it; but soon it grew back as strong as ever. Then some bright person suggested that willow trees be planted on the banks of the canal, and soon the weed disappeared for good. The reason simply was this, that the nourishment that otherwise would have fed the weed now went to sustain the willow trees.

"This incident has its parallel in real life. The story goes that some of the companions of the venerable Bede, at his monastery at Monkwearmouth in northeastern England, came to him one day and said: 'Father, we are harassed by many temptations, which appeal to us so often and so strongly that they give us no rest. You seem to live untroubled by these things and we want to know your secret. Don't those temptations which harass our souls ever appeal to you? Do they never come knocking at the door of your heart?' The old saint listened, smiled, and said: 'I do know something of the things of which you speak. The temptations that trouble you do come making their appeal to me. But when those temptations knock at the door of my heart, I always answer, 'This place is occupied' and that is the end of it.' John Newton, the well-known hymn-writer of the eighteenth century, used to say that two things kept him out of hell in his early days: his early and life-long love of Mary Catlett (the woman he subsequently married) and his early and lifelong love of good books."¹⁰

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Paul wrote, "...take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). To the church at Philippi he wrote, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil. 4:8). Only by keeping the mind full of good things is one able to keep bad thoughts out which would lead to sin.

Jesus pictured such a situation in one of his parables. He told of the unclean spirit being thrown out of a man. Finding no rest he returns to his original house. He finds it empty, swept, and put in order. "Then he goes and brings with him seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. So shall it be also with this evil generation" (Mt. 12:45).

It was Spurgeon who once said, "Some temptations come to the industrious, but all temptations attack the idle." If your life is not filled with good things, Satan will have special opportunity to lead you into temptation. Paul says, "...give no opportunity to the devil" (Eph. 4:27), and that is best done by filling our life with good things rather than things such as anger (Eph. 4:26), impurity (Eph. 5:3), or wine (Eph. 5:18).

In the Shepherd of Hermas we read, "But as many as are utterly empty, fear the devil as if he had power....the devil cometh to all the servants of God tempting them. As many then as are complete in the faith, oppose him mightily, and he departeth from them, not having a place where he can find an entrance. So he cometh next to the empty ones, and finding a place goeth into them, and further he doeth what he willeth in them, and they become submissive slaves to him."**(11)** Do not give the devil an entrance into your heart by keeping your soul,

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your heart, your mind, and your life filled with good things.

9. Look to God's word for encouragement. The Old Testament wisdom literature says, "The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death" (Prov. 13:14). David, a man who knew the force of temptation, wrote, "...by the word of thy lips I have avoided the ways of the violent" (Psa. 17:4). Psalms 119:165 is also helpful: "Great peace have those who love thy law; nothing can make them stumble."**12** Many people know from experience that a favorite and appropriate scripture committed to memory can be just the aid one may need to avoid falling into temptation.

The scriptures help in another manner. Encouragement can be found in knowing of others who have faced the same temptations and have come through them victorious. One should turn to the Bible and study characters such as Moses (Heb. 11:25), Joseph (Gen. 39:9), Daniel (Dan. 1:8; 6:10), and Daniel's three friends (Dan. 3:16-18). "Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1).

10. Resist the devil. James says to fight temptation by fighting against the devil: "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (Jas. 4:7). "For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). And the Christian's armor for such a battle is truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, the word of God, and prayer (Eph. 6:13-18).

In the writings of the Apostolic Fathers we find this interesting quote: "'Man, Sir,' I say, 'is eager to keep the commandments of God, and there is no one

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that asketh not of the Lord, that he may be strengthened in His commandments, and be subject to them; but the devil is hard and overmastereth them.' 'He cannot,' saith he, 'overmaster the servants of God, who set their hope on Him with their whole heart. The devil can wrestle with them, but he cannot overthrow them. If then ye resist him, he will be vanquished, and will flee from you disgraced.'"13) Is not that a wonderful expression of the truth we find in the Bible that Satan cannot overpower us. If we determine to fight him, then, we can defeat him. It is not an impossible struggle.

11. Remember that the Lord has placed a limit on temptation. "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13). In elevators you usually see a sign posted saying, "Load capacity--8 passengers" or some such similar number. Just as the elevator has a load limit, God knows the temptation endurance limit of every person. He will not allow anyone to be tempted beyond their limit of resistance.

12. Use the preventive approach with temptation. This approach works best in so many areas of life. For example, a man visiting in a foreign country can take a chance of catching dysentery and then take medicine for it if he does catch it. A better approach would be to take proper safeguards in his choice of food and drinking water, so that hopefully he will not catch it. The better method is obvious.

In the Old Testament the preventive method was often taught and used. Concerning the loose woman the advise was, "Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house" (Prov. 5:8). Why take a risk? "Can a man carry fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned? Or can one

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walk upon hot coals and his feet not be scorched?" (Prov. 6:27-28). Do not pitch your tent toward Sodom, or you may barely escape as Lot did, but only at great loss to himself.

The preventive approach is so important that Jesus said, "And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire" (Mt. 18:8-9). Of course, a literal obedience to such a passage would make a hospital of the church overnight. Jesus, though not wanting this to be taken literally, did want it taken seriously.

A person should never place himself in precarious situations where the will to resist may not be able to withstand the surrounding temptations. The story is often told of the reformed alcoholic out West who tied his horse in front of a bar every day to show his strength. A deacon in the church noticed this and said, "George, I am much older than you, and will be pardoned, I know, if I make a suggestion out of my wider Christian experience. No matter how strong you think you are, take my advice and at once change your hitching post." Another similar story tells of a man who also hitched his horse in front of a bar, and he soon returned to his drinking.

Hallock tells of a member of a Puerto Rican mission who went to a missionary and asked to be released from the job of treasurer of the Sunday school. He explained that he would soon be employed irregularly, since his factory was going to reduce its work time. His approaching need for money would tempt him too much, he felt, to hold the money bags for the Sunday school. It was a

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brave and very wise thing for him to do.

Trochilus, a disciple of Plato, is supposed to have barely escaped from a storm at sea in which he almost lost his life. Upon arriving at home he immediately had his servants cover up the two windows of his house that faced the sea. He was afraid that on some nice, calm, sunny day he would see the tranquil ocean and would be tempted to sail again, maybe to the loss of his life. This is the preventive approach where one does all he can to remove the temptation from his presence.

A man is said to have applied for a vacant position of pilot on a Mississippi steamer many years ago. The owner looked at him and said, "Do you know about the river--where the snags are, and so on?" "Well, I'm pretty well acquainted with the river," the man replied, "but when you come in talking about snags, I don't know exactly where they are." "You don't know where the snags are!" said the owner in surprise. "Then how do you expect to get a position as the pilot of this boat?" "Well, sir," the applicant said grinning, "I may not know just where the snags are, but you can depend on my knowing where they ain't, and that's where I calculate to do my sailing." If you are beset with temptation, calculate on doing your sailing where temptation is not so strong.

13. Look to the example of Christ. When temptation is strong and there is fear of succumbing to it, you should remember the example of Christ. "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (Heb. 4:15). The comfort is that Christ had to face the same temptations while he was in the flesh, so he does understand what you are going through in your hour of trial.

Having someone who understands is a great help

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in itself. For example, there was a man in an important position in which he was trusted with large amounts of money. He was tempted to place some aside for himself and put it in his own account. He was sure that the theft would not be discovered for a long time. He resisted, but he felt he must talk to someone to work out the problem. He went to the man who had held the job before him. Instead of being shocked, the former employee put his hand on his shoulder and said, "I know exactly how you feel. I went through it all myself when I occupied your position." Just having someone who understood is what helped him.

14. Trust in the Lord and he will help you. This may sound trite at first as if it is nothing more than a pious platitude, but the scriptures teach this. The writer to the Hebrews wrote, "For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted" (Heb. 2:18). As Wilson once said, "When a man resists sin on human motives only, he will not hold out long."

In the hour of my distress,
When temptations me oppress,
And when I my sins confess,
Sweet Spirit comfort me!**14)**

The Thorn of Persecution

"Henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus."

--Galatians 6:17

"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you."

--2 Corinthians 4:8-12

The opinion that Paul's thorn in the flesh was persecution has been a widespread one. Persecution could explain 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, but it would not fit very well in Galatians 4:12-15. Would Paul pray three times for persecution to be removed? Did not Paul write, "Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12)? Was not Paul surely aware of the teaching of Jesus on the blessings of persecution: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:10)? Did not Paul say, "For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10)? The proximity of this last verse to the passage telling of the thorn in Paul's flesh might imply that Paul's thorn was persecution

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(2 Cor. 12:7). If persecution was Paul's thorn in the flesh, though, it certainly could not be Paul's "bodily ailment" (Gal. 4:12-15). Persecution is something one might boast about, yet Paul's bodily ailment was something for which the Galatians would normally have scorned or despised him.

Whether or not Paul's thorn in the flesh was persecution, persecution is a problem for many today. Much time could be spent in this chapter telling of the persecution of the early church, but no one in America has to face this type of problem. Much space could be devoted to telling of the persecutions that Christians are having to face in foreign countries, especially those under Communist domination or right-wing dictators. Again, though, few readers of this book have to face such problems. The main type of persecution that the average Christian faces today is little more than slander or rejection from one's peers. Although this is much easier to bear than persecutions such as Paul faced, it is, nevertheless, a problem with which to contend.

When faced with persecution, slander, or opposition in living the Christian life, the first thing to do is to remember that persecution is common to God's people. From the early days of Old Testament history to the end of the book of Revelation, from the events surrounding the beginning of the church to present day newspaper headlines, God's people have had to face persecution. Stephen, whom himself was martyred, asked, "Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered" (Acts 7:52). The church in the early days was everywhere "spoken against" (Acts 28:22). To quote Paul again, "Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). Peter told his readers, "Beloved, do not be surprised at

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the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you" (1 Pet. 4:12). John wrote, "Do not wonder, brethren, that the world hates you" (1 Jn. 3:13).

Persecution has been the common lot of God's people for centuries. The Old Testament prophets were persecuted. The New Testament apostles were persecuted. Jesus himself was persecuted and crucified. Throughout history the church has suffered many different waves of persecution. Throughout these difficult times, Christians have realized that they were following in the footsteps of Jesus and declaring their devotion to him by their sacrifices. Peter explains the example we should look toward: "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21).

John, maybe more than any other New Testament writer, brings out the relationship between Jesus' sufferings and those of his disciples. He quotes Jesus as saying, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (Jn. 15:18-19). Later Jesus prays, "I have given them thy word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world....They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (Jn. 17:14, 16). Later John himself writes, "The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him" (1 Jn. 3:1).

The truth of these verses has been summarized well by William Barclay: "The world suspects people who are different. That comes out in the simplest things. One of the commonest things in the world nowadays is an umbrella; but when Jonas Hanway tried to introduce the umbrella into England and

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walked down the street beneath one he was pelted with stones and dirt. He was in fact persecuted. In the early days of the Boy's Brigade, the boys who marched down the street in uniform were often attacked and pelted with stones and garbage. Anyone who is different, who wears different clothes, who has different ideas is automatically suspect. He may be regarded as an eccentric or as a madman or a danger; but life will not be comfortable for him.

"The world acutely dislikes people whose lives are a condemnation of it. It is in fact dangerous to be good. The classic instance of that is the fate which befell Aristides in Athens. He was called Aristides the Just; and yet he was banished. When one of the citizens was asked why he had voted for the banishment of Aristides, he answered: 'Because I am tired of hearing him always called the Just.' That was why men killed Socrates; they called him the human gadfly. He was always compelling men to think and to examine themselves, and men hated that and hated him and killed him. It is dangerous to have and to practice a higher standard than the standard of the world. Nowadays a man can be persecuted even for working too hard or too long.

"To put it at its widest--the world always suspects nonconformity. The world likes a pattern; it likes to be able to label a person and to classify him and to put him in a pigeon-hole. And anyone who does not conform to the pattern will certainly meet trouble. It is even said that if a hen with different markings is put into a hen run where all the hens are the same, the other hens will peck her to death.

"The basic demand on the Christian is the demand that the Christian should have the courage to be different. To be different is dangerous, but no man can be a Christian unless he accepts that risk, for there will be a difference between the man of

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the world and the man of Christ."¹)

Since persecution is certain to be the fate of those who seek to be truly Christian, what should you do to face it? Totally avoiding it would take a sacrifice of your principles, so that solution is not appropriate. The answer, then, would seem to begin with your realization of the blessings of persecution. Jesus himself taught, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Mt. 5:10-12; cf. Lk. 6:22-23; 1 Pet. 3:14-17; 4:14, 16; Jas. 1:12). "How," you may ask, "can persecution be considered a blessing?"

Persecution can help you to truly know yourself. Peter apparently thought he was a tower of strength until persecution revealed just how weak he really was. Especially illustrative of this, though, is the story of a young man in training for the Army reserves. He and others were out in the wilderness for days on half-starvation diets. Previously he had thought that if he had only one can of rations left, he would surely share it with a friend who had none. When this situation actually came up, however, he decided against sharing his last can of food. He would keep it for himself and would eat it in privacy later. As it turned out, his friend stole it from him before he could eat it. A real test will show our strength or weakness and help us to know ourselves.

Persecution will help you to know the real values in life. Moses affords us with an example of one who in the face of persecution chose true riches: "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing

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rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasure of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward" (Heb. 11:24-26).

Persecution gives you a special opportunity to demonstrate your faith. Paul said he commended himself in every way as a servant of Christ. Among those ways he listed afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, and imprisonments (2 Cor. 6:4-5). These trials were evidence of his devotion to Christ. The story is told of a man who enlisted in the army after having been the preacher of a small church. Because of this background he was often ridiculed. He was purposely assigned the task of cleaning latrines. Instead of returning evil for evil, he did his work cheerfully and well. When he was provoked, his attitude was not one of resentment. Eventually the men began to turn to him with their problems. He finally taught many of them about Christ.

Persecution can make you depend more upon the Lord. Paul said, "For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). When we see our own weaknesses, it should cause us to depend more upon the power and strength of Christ. Once Paul even felt that death was near for him, but after being delivered he concluded, "...that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God" (2 Cor. 1:9). As Abraham Lincoln said, "I have often been driven to my knees in prayer because I had nowhere else to go." Often it takes persecution or some sort of difficulty to make our stubborn hearts realize that we need God.

Persecution is a blessing for one special reason more than any other. In persecution we are showing our corporate affiliation as a part of the body of

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Christ. Peter said that when persecutions come our way, we should "rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings" (1 Pet. 4:13). Paul said we are fellow heirs with Christ, provided "we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom. 8:17; cf. Phil. 3:10). Everyone, as our Lord told us, must pick up his own cross in order to follow him.

Must Jesus bear the cross alone,
And all the world go free?
No, there's a cross for ev'ry one,
And there's a cross for me.²⁾

And it was Isaac Watts who wrote,

Must I be carried to the skies,
On flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?
Sure I must fight if I would reign;
Increase my courage, Lord!
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by Thy word.³⁾

One of the most fascinating statements in the Bible that speaks of our sharing in the suffering of Christ is Colossians 1:24: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church." Upon first reading the verse one is almost shocked. You may wonder, "In what manner is Christ's suffering incomplete? What could be lacking in the death of the one who paid it all for my sins?" You wonder in what way the work of atonement needs supplementing.

The difficulty is resolved if we consider the sufferings of Christ from two different points of view.

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As Lightfoot words it, "They have their sacrificial efficacy, and they have their ministerial utility."⁴) Certainly what is lacking in Jesus' sufferings has nothing to do with their sacrificial efficacy. On the other hand we should not go to the extreme of some in opposition to Catholic thought and try to "wrest the sense of the words."⁵) They plainly say that in some manner Paul makes up what is lacking in Christ's sufferings.

The only viable alternative is the ministerial utility of Christ's sacrifice. From this aspect the atonement is incomplete and lacking. It is necessary for the church to spread the good news of the death of Christ to the world. Otherwise the cross is ineffective. As the church grows, as the gospel is spread, and as the truth of the love of God shown at Calvary is proclaimed, there will be repeated acts of suffering on the part of Christians in order to attain these goals. The words of a popular poem express the thought very well:

Christ has no hands but our hands
To do His work today;
He has no feet but our feet
To lead men in His way;
He has no tongue but our tongues
To tell men how He died;
He has no help but our help
To bring them to His side.

We are the only Bible
The careless world will read;
We are the sinner's gospel,
We are the scoffer's creed;
We are the Lord's last message
Given in deed and word--
What if the line is crooked?
What if the type is blurred?

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What if our hands are busy
With other work than His?
What if our feet are walking
Where sin's allurements is?
What if our tongues are speaking
Of things His lips would spurn?
How can we hope to help Him
Unless from Him we learn?6)

These, then, are some of the blessings you can receive from persecution; the opportunity to really know yourself, the encouragement to know what is of real value in life, the opportunity to demonstrate your faith, the prompting to make you depend more upon the Lord, and the privilege of sharing in the sufferings of Christ. If you must face persecution for the cause of Christ, you should rejoice that you "were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (Acts 5:41). Now that we have examined why persecution can be a blessing in disguise, let us review some things to do in order to overcome persecution.

First, you should study the great passages in the Bible that deal with persecution. The greatest of all of these may be the book of Revelation. It was written to Christians at a time when the Roman Empire was persecuting Christians just for being Christians. The whole theme of the book of Revelation is that good will eventually win over evil, although at the time it may appear otherwise. The message is to remain faithful even to the point of death (Rev. 2:10). Likewise you can study the lives and examples of others like Old Testament prophets who had to face persecution. Most of all study the life of Jesus Christ. Seeing how others have been victorious against evil will inspire you. As Bruce Barton said, "Before you give up hope, turn back and read the attacks that were made upon Lincoln."

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Another way to respond to persecution is to pray for the one persecuting you. Jesus gave the command to "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt. 5:44). Luke records him as saying, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Lk. 6:27-28).⁷⁾

A Christian is expected to make sacrifices for the cause of Christ. Paul writes, in almost shocking language, "When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things" (1 Cor. 4:12-13). Paul uses two words here that are extremely intriguing and illustrative. First, he says Christians are the "refuse" of the world. The term "refuse" refers to the dirt or refuse that is removed from a vessel when it is cleansed on the inside. The term "off-scouring" refers to the dirt or filth that is scraped or scoured off a dirty vessel.⁸⁾ Barclay translates it very graphically: "We have been treated like the scum of the earth, like the dregs of all things."⁹⁾ The TEV renders it: "We are no more than this world's garbage; we are the scum of the earth to this very hour!"¹⁰⁾ Other translations are very similar.

What does Paul mean by such degrading terms? The latter word "had become more and more a term of polite self-deprecation, common enough in everyday speech."¹¹⁾ These words, then, could very well mean little more than any common term of humility. There is a history behind these words, however, which could have influenced Paul's usage here. There was an ancient custom among the Greeks of Athens to throw the most worthless person into the sea to avert the plague, a famine, or other troubles. It became an annual custom to make a human sacrifice for the benefit of the rest of the people, saying,

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"Be our offscouring." Thus, the word can mean "ransom, scapegoat, or sacrifice."**12**) In fact, one of the words is used in the sense of a "ransom" in the LXX of Proverbs 21:18.

Paul is teaching Christians that because they are suffering persecution for righteousness sake in order to spread the gospel, they are a ransom or sacrifice for the rest of the world. By this we should not think that this suffering has any atoning value in the sense that Christ's suffering did, but through the suffering of the church, we complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions (Col. 1:24). Christ's mission is to "reconcile to himself all things" (Col. 1:20); and this is being done not only through what he has already accomplished, but through the mission of the church. It is "through the church" that God's plan is being revealed. Without the church, Christ as the head is incomplete, for he has no body. The church as the body of Christ is "the fulness of him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23). Our sufferings and afflictions in persecution are an extension of what Christ has already done, not in their efficacy, but in their ministerial utility.

Persecution can be a blessing to the church. As a result of persecution the early Christians scattered everywhere preaching the word. "The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church," we have often heard. Persecution, though it may deplete the ranks of the church at times, usually results in an increase in dedication and strength. It is a necessary test in this life. Persecution and suffering are an essential part of God's plan for the church. Just as Christ showed the love of God to the world through his sacrificial suffering and death, the church as the body of Christ must follow his example. Such a call is not an easy call, but it is the call of eternal life.

The only real problem with this discussion is the one we mentioned at the outset. Most middle class

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American Christians do not really know what persecution is except in a very minor way. This could be considered a wonderful blessing, but it also might be a reason for the absence of power within the church. Pierre Berton has asked some troubling questions in this regard: "Why is it that the Church today is afraid to speak loudly and with a radical voice? Perhaps it is because the Church, like too many of its members, is afraid to look ridiculous. It ought to be making front-page headlines regularly by advocating what is absolutely counter to the general thrust of society; but it does not do so. How many Christian ministers today go to jail for their beliefs? How many make the kind of physical protest that puts them outside the bounds of the social order? ...The institution of religion, which once generated its own values, now merely gives its blessings to the majority-held values of the community around it."**13)** The church can become merely a preserver and conservator of the status-quo rather than being on the cutting edge of change for truth and justice. When Christians are what they should be, there will be persecution and rejection by the world. It may begin with joking or making fun of Christians or their beliefs, but persecution will come.

When I feel that scornful glare,
When a wrong I'm made to bear,
E'en from those I know in prayer;
Sweet Spirit comfort me!

The Thorn of Guilt

According to some Paul's thorn in the flesh was guilt over his former actions when he persecuted the church. Paul himself wrote, "I am the least of the apostles, because I persecuted the church of God" (1 Cor. 15:9). In writing to Timothy he said, "The saying is sure and worthy and of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am foremost of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15).

To think that Paul's thorn in the flesh was the haunting memory of his former days does not fit the description of the thorn very well, however. Also, such an idea does not fit the image of Paul portrayed to us through his writings. Paul did say he was the least of the apostles, since he persecuted the church of God, but he followed that statement in this way: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:10). Yes, Paul did claim to be the foremost of sinners, but he followed that claim with a declaration of peaceful assurance: "I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience for an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life" (1 Tim. 1:16). Although Paul had done many things wrong, he knew the sweet blessing of being forgiven by God.

Guilt, though, is a thorn in the flesh for many people in the world today. The administrator of a large mental hospital in London once told a British preacher, "If the people here only knew what it means to be forgiven, I could dismiss half of them at once." Many agree with Alfred Korzybski that

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"God may forgive your sins, but your nervous system won't." R. D. Ice explains how guilt affects us: "There is much guilt and a great need for forgiveness. Much of the emotional stress which people feel is due to their sense of guilt. Guilt becomes a crushing weight on their back, and each day they face anxiety and worry resulting from this. Guilt can warp a person to the point where life itself cannot be enjoyed. Guilt can cause a person to feel they are 'different' somehow and that everyone knows their 'secret.' Guilt can cause a person to become their own worst enemy, and in the depths of despair--to defeat themselves."**1)**

"Guilt serves a purpose and is valuable to the Christian--but only when properly handled. The devil can use guilt to destroy your soul--if your relationship to God is not right. If you cannot look to God as your Father with deep confidence in the abundant life you have in Christ--the devil can fill your heart with despair."**2)** As Paul explained, "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death" (2 Cor. 7:10).

A good example of how guilt can either lead us to do better or turn us to despair is that of Peter and Judas. Peter was sorry and guilty for what he had done, but he allowed that to cause him to live even better for the Lord. Judas allowed his grief to turn to despair, and he went out and committed suicide. We need the attitude of Peter and Paul where we realize that we are sinners, but we also realize that God forgives.

"The ability to feel guilt," Dan Eubanks explains, "was intended by God for our good and never for our harm. It is 'religiously healthy,' and is intended to serve as a temporary pain which will turn us back in the right direction and then be resolved."**3)** In fact some in the mental health field criticize

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certain methods as trying to bring the conscience down to the same level as one's behavior. The goal seems to be to enable individuals to do anything they want without being bothered by it.⁴⁾

Instead the only way to have a happy, guilt-free life is to live a life that is good.⁵⁾ If people improve their lifestyle morally, they remove guilt by living up to their consciences. To ignore our consciences is to face the consequences. If we break the laws of God, those laws bring unpleasant results. If we jump out of a tenth-story window, we do not break the law of gravity. It breaks us. Likewise guilt is a natural consequence of sin. Guilt is useful in directing us toward right living.⁶⁾

Too many people in the church, though, suffer from unresolved guilt. Many have emotional scars from guilt that still bring pain. These people have done what is necessary for the forgiveness of sin, but they still feel unforgiven. They are not guilty before God, but they feel guilty regardless. Most preachers have to deal with people who feel forgiven though they have not done what is necessary for forgiveness, but the reverse problem is becoming all too common.

In a survey by Dan Eubanks, 26 of 39 preachers answered "Yes" to the question, "Do you believe unresolved guilt is a significant problem in the church today?" In response to the same question, 51 of 72 church members said, "Yes." Some said, "Very definitely!" When asked, "Do you find it hard to forgive yourself?" 57 of 72 members of the church polled replied, "Yes." Can we hide our heads in the sand and deceive ourselves into thinking that unresolved guilt is not a problem? We would expect it to be a problem outside the body of Christ, because it **is** unresolved there, but within the body of Christ we would think that unresolved guilt would be a trivial difficulty rarely encountered.

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One preacher stood up and asked a Bible class, "How many of you know you are saved?" Only two of about fifty raised their hand. "That is just because they did not want to raise their hand in public," you respond. But in a private, written survey, fifty members of the church described their entrance into heaven in phrases such as "by the skin of my teeth" while seventeen described it as "an abundant entrance." The latter phrase is found in 2 Pet. 1:11, but the overwhelming majority preferred "by the skin of my teeth," maybe thinking of passages such as Luke 17:10 or 1 Peter 4:18.

Norman Vincent Peale explains the way people reason and his approach for helping them with unresolved guilt. He explains that some people become accustomed to a guilt complex. Though it sounds strange, some people find it difficult to let go of guilt--even though that guilt is unpleasant. People want to feel forgiven, but they often reject the freedom of forgiveness.

Sometimes an individual will confess his sin and experience the relief of forgiveness. Soon, though, you may observe him still feeling guilty and desiring to confess the same sin again. Soon this turns into a cycle where he feels guilty, confesses, and then feels a temporary peace of mind. This becomes a cycle of defeat which must be broken. One should walk forward after the experience of release and peace found in forgiveness, not backward into a circle.

Peale tells of a man who repeatedly confessed the same sin over to him. After this had happened several times, Peale admonished him to stop the cycle of defeat and never mention that sin again to another person. A few months later the man visited him. He said he had been able to put that sin completely behind him. He mentioned a passage of scripture which he had memorized: "Forgetting those

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things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before" (Phil. 3:13-14).⁷ If we continue to harbor our guilt after we have done everything God requires for forgiveness, not only are we doubting God, we are living a life of the past. We are robbing ourselves of our future. Believe that God will forgive you and then forgive yourself.

There was a Scotchman who had been a terrible sinner, but he had changed his life and become a powerful preacher. One evening just before he rose to speak, someone handed him an envelope. He opened it and found a long list of sins and crimes he had done in that very city. His first reaction was the desire to run away in shame and guilt, but he acted differently. He boldly said, "Friends, I am accused of crimes and sins committed in this very city. I will read them to you." After reading the whole list he admitted, "I am guilty. You ask how I dare come to you and speak of righteousness and truth, with a list of crimes like that against my name? I will tell you: 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.'"

To remove the thorn of guilt, you need to believe that God really forgives those who repent. David once wrote,

The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in
steadfast love.

He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger for ever.

He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor requite us according to our iniquities.

For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those
who fear him;

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as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions
from us.

As a father pities his children,
so the Lord pities those who fear him.

For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust.

(Psa. 103:8-14).

The key phrase in this passage for our study is David's explanation of how far God removes our sins from us when he forgives: "As far as the east is from the west." The earth has a North and South pole, but no East and West pole. The distance from the North to the South pole can be measured, but the distance from East to West on earth can not be measured. You can go all the way around the earth a dozen times and still be heading east--or west.

Similarly, you have heard the expression, "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." The thought is that two cultures can be so different that there will never be any resolution between them. A missionary friend of mine quoted that expression as we sat in a McDonald's restaurant in Bangkok, Thailand. This missionary said he thought they may have finally met. David's point, though, should be reassuring. When God forgives, he takes our sin far away from us.

God's forgiveness is described by Micah as the casting of "all our sins into the depths of the sea" (Mic. 7:19). A few statistics about the oceans of the world will serve to help us understand the depth of God's forgiveness. Oceans cover over seventy per cent of the earth's surface. The Atlantic Ocean's average depth is 14,000 feet with its greatest depth near Puerto Rico at 28,374 feet. The Indian Ocean has one trench near Java which is 25,344 feet below the surface. The Pacific Ocean covers more than a

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third of the surface of the earth and has an average depth of 14,000 feet. The deepest spot in the Pacific is the Challenger Deep near Guam--36,198 feet below the surface! This is the deepest known spot in any ocean. If you dropped Mount Everest (29,028 feet) into this spot, the water would cover it by more than a mile! So when Micah says forgiveness is like God casting our sins into the depth of the seas, forgiveness is total and complete.**8)**

Another very important description of forgiveness is that when God forgives, he forgets: "For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more" (Heb. 8:12; 10:17; Jer. 31:34; Psa. 25:7; Ezek. 18:22; Isa. 43:25).

As far as the east is removed from the west,
My sins are remembered no more;
Forever my soul is at perfect rest,
My sins are remembered no more.
Forgiven, forgotten, all cleansed in the Blood,
My sins are remembered no more;
Atoned for by Jesus in Calv'ry's flood,
My sins are remembered no more.**9)**

Once there was a benevolent medical doctor who had the custom of checking his books for debts that patients were unable to pay. On his ledger he would sometimes place a red mark through those debts and then write beside them, "Forgiven, unable to pay." When this man died, his widow made note of all of the unpaid bills in his books. She began to have a strong desire to collect that money. She sued the debtors in the county court. The judge asked how she knew these people owed her the money. "I have it in my husband's book," she answered. She then showed the judge the book. The judge asked if the red marks were her husband's writing. "Yes," she said. He then declared, "Then no court in the world

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would give you a verdict against these people when your husband, with his own pen, has written, 'Forgiven; unable to pay.'"

When God forgives, our sins are no longer remembered or counted against us. Likewise we should do our best to forgive ourselves and forget our past wrongdoings as far as worry is concerned. Our past sins are good to remember as a reminder to ourselves not to do them again, but unnecessary worry and guilt over them will do us no good. It is said that a Canadian official has advocated the destruction of a criminal's record after twelve years of good behavior, so that the man can start anew. It is wonderful that we can already do this with God.

In trying to teach the reality of forgiveness and its meaning to a group of young people in a devotional one night, I used an object lesson which I had read in an idea book somewhere. First we studied the different metaphors for forgiveness in the Bible. We saw that forgiveness was described as a healing (Psa. 41:4; 103:3; Jer. 3:22; 30:17). When we are forgiven we are pardoned (Num. 14:20; Psa. 25:11; Isa. 55:7), and our sins are not charged to our account (Rom. 4:8; Mt. 6:12; 18:23-27). God puts our sins out of his sight (2 Sam. 12:13; Isa. 38:17; Psa. 51:9), covers them up (Psa. 32:1; 85:2; Rom. 4:7), and blots them out (Psa. 51:1, 9; Isa. 43:25). Forgiveness is like receiving a new change of garments (Zech. 3:1-5; Rev. 7:14; Isa. 61:10) and is described as a washing (Psa. 51:2, 7; Acts 22:16). Finally we noted that when God forgives, he forgets and removes our sins far away from us. We then said prayers asking God to forgive us of our sins.

In this devotional I stressed very much the scriptural idea of forgiveness being like God covering our sins. The word "atone" in the Old Testament is associated with this idea of covering

"Sister," said a dying girl, "please get the Bible

1:7-9).

and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins his Son cleanses us from all sin....If we confess our fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have obtained from God. John the apostle wrote, "If we guilt needs to realize that forgiveness can be Forgiveness is real and the person burdened with crucifixion of Jesus.

giveness and sang songs, especially about the their sin list go up in smoke, we prayed for for- we ignited in our fire place. As everyone watched these little slips of paper to a wooden cross which a list on a small piece of paper. We then pinned giveness. Everyone was asked to write their sins in idea borrowed from another minister to explain for- In another devotional with young people I used an when he forgives us.

had been covered just as God covers over our sins home. When they did, they found that their sin list them with instructions not to open it until they got leaving to go home, their envelope was given to sealed. After refreshments and just as everyone was sin sheet was then wrapped in an envelope and giveness were included on the yellow sheet. Their **"FORGIVEN."** Several scripture references to for- printed on it, in very large letters, the word, each young person's sins. The yellow sheet had pasted a large sheet of yellow paper over the list of eating refreshments, I locked myself in a room and side rather than by their name. While they were identifiably each piece of paper by a code on the back They did not trust me very much, so we had to to write some of their sins on a piece of paper, devotional came. I asked each of the young people (Psa. 32:1). This is when the surprise part of the

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and read for me that passage about the Blood which cleanseth from sin. I fear some of my sins are too great to be forgiven. Look whether it says 'all sin' or only 'sin,' for I do not remember." "Yes," replied the sister, "these are the exact words: 'The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from **all** sin.'" "Oh, how sweet!" said the girl whose life was almost over. "There is pardon for **all** my sins."

Since our forgiveness comes through the blood of Jesus Christ and his righteousness, it is not necessary for us to be perfect or sinless. John tells us that if we claim to have no sin, we are just deceiving ourselves (1 Jn. 1:8, 10). Due to our inability to live a sinless life, our salvation must be by grace: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God--not because of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). The grace of God should not be misunderstood as a license for sin (Rom. 6:1-2; 1 Jn. 2:1), but guilt over sins God has already forgiven is not the solution either.

The story is told of a friend who showed John Ruskin a very expensive handkerchief on which a blot of ink had been dropped. "Nothing can be done with it now," the owner said. "It is absolutely worthless." Ruskin made no reply but carried the handkerchief away with him. Later he sent it back and the friend could scarcely believe his eyes. In a very skillful and artistic manner, Ruskin had made a design on the handkerchief with India ink, using the ugly blot as a center for the design. A blotted life, blotted with sin, is not worthless and useless. God can and will forgive and make that life useful in his service.

There is an interesting Jewish legend about the creation of man which illustrates God's attitude toward forgiveness. On the eve of man's creation, God talked with his angels around his throne. The

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angel of justice advised God not to create man: "He will commit all kinds of cruelties and injustices toward his fellowman." Similarly the angel of truth encouraged God not to create man: "He will be false to you and to others."

The angel of holiness agreed: "Create him not. He will indulge in that which is impure in your sight, and he will dishonor you." There was silence until the angel of mercy spoke: "Create him, heavenly Father. When he sins and turns penitently from sin and to the path of right, truth, and holiness, I will take him tenderly by the hand, speak loving words to him and bring him to you for your mercy and forgiveness."

The forgiveness of God is real and available for all who will turn to him. If your thorn in the flesh is guilt over past sins, seek forgiveness from God for those sins through confession, repentance, and obedience. If you have already sought forgiveness, be like Paul who praised God for his forgiving grace. A trusting belief in the teaching of the Bible on forgiveness is an important part of the cure for the thorn in the flesh of guilt.

When the house doth sigh and weep,
And the world is drowned in sleep,
Yet mine eyes the watch do keep;
Sweet Spirit comfort me!**10)**

The Thorn of Discouragement

"The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation."

-- H. D. Thoreau

"I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on earth. Whether I shall be better I cannot tell. I awfully forebode I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible. I must die or be better."

-- Abraham Lincoln

23 January 1841

In the opinion of some Paul's thorn in the flesh was the temptation to shirk his duties. His thorn is said to be the desire to quit, a desire caused by depression, discouragement, and a sense of despair. Seeing that Paul's thorn in the flesh was most likely a physical ailment, this is very unlikely. In Paul we do not see a man on the verge of apostasy. Instead we see one who boldly asks, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:35). Paul in the midst of persecution could hold his head high in prayer and song. He wrote, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair" (2 Cor. 4:8). William Barclay rendered this, "We are sore pressed at every point, but not hemmed in. We are at our wit's end, but never at our hope's end."

Though discouragement and a desire to give up may not have been Paul's thorn in the flesh, it is a common difficulty for millions of other people. Dis-

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couragement takes its toll in church membership rolls. Every congregation has members who are no longer active. If all out-of-duty Christians were restored, some surveys estimate that a typical congregation would double in size. The reasons for people "quitting" the church are many and complex, but discouragement and a sense of failure are frequently an important factor.

Not only do we hear many laments over members leaving the pews, the same cries are being sounded over preachers leaving the pulpit. Frequently articles appear on "Why Preachers Are Leaving the Pulpit." Fortunately there does not seem to be a preacher shortage, since so many new ministers are being trained. As long as a congregation can provide adequate support, it can hire plenty of available ministers. The tragedy is that many openings are being made for young preachers through experienced, talented men giving up on the ministry. Elton Trueblood once said, "I receive a constant stream of letters from clergymen who are so frustrated in their work that they desire some kind of change in vocation." Many of our fellowship are similarly frustrated.1)

Many Christians are discouraged or depressed about their family, their job, or just life in general. Depression is one of the most common diseases in America today. It spreads like a common cold. It varies from just a case of the blues to more severe forms where hospitalization, drugs, and extensive counseling are required. Suicide is found in our society today in alarming proportions. Some are so discouraged and depressed with life they just want to quit.

Depression can have a physiological or a psychological cause. It can have a spiritual dimension, because separation from God and a life of sin will not bring happiness. To overcome an emotional dif-

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ficulty like depression, one must first recognize the problem and then search for the causes. Most of the time the causes can be traced back to childhood and methods of interaction with other persons that one learned at that time. If causes are discovered, one must learn the dynamics of these causes and the emotional workings of the personality. If one's depression is more than just a case of the blues, professional help may be necessary to deal with the problem.²⁾

Is discouragement your thorn in the flesh? Do you feel like quitting? Have you said that you tried and have failed? Do you feel like further effort is useless? Satan hopes that you will feel this way. One fable tells of the devil putting his tools up for sale. Buyers observed weapons such as hatred, envy, jealousy, deceit, lying, pride and so forth. Separated from all the others was a tool with a very high price upon it. It was discouragement.

The devil said it was priced higher because it was more useful than the others. "I can pry open and get inside a man's heart with that," he explained, "when I can not get inside with other tools. I can make him do what I choose. It is badly worn because I use it on almost everyone, since few people know it belongs to me." Another form of this fable says an angel told the devil that God had taken away all of his tools except discouragement. The devil in glee said that he had taken away nothing, for through discouragement he still possessed all of the others.

Discouragement, depression, a sense of failure, and a desire to quit are very powerful forces in the lives of many today, so it is worth our time to study some suggestions on how to fight discouragement and depression. Especially if you are discouraged as a Christian or in some particular ministry as a Christian, we hope this chapter will en-

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courage you.

1. Realize that depression is a very common problem. Donner Atwood wrote aptly on this: "There is one fact which should be made crystal clear at the outset: virtually no one is immune from mental and emotional depression. Only those who are very superficial and shallow in their personalities escape the disease. The more sensitive a person is, the more likelihood he or she is to experience at one time or another some degree of depression. It is usually the 'high-achievers' who suffer most severely. The National Institute of Mental Health reports that upwards of eight million Americans suffer some form of the malady every year, and that of these, a quarter a million suffer depression to the point where they must be hospitalized for treatment.

"We who are Christians must be careful at one point: religion is no guarantee against depression. When you turn to the Bible you find all kinds of evidence of biblical heroes who knew depression....

"When you leave the biblical scene you may note that some of the great figures of history were tormented souls. Recall that lovely hymn of tranquility, 'Dear Lord and Father of Mankind'....It speaks eloquently of the serenity for which we all reach. Yet its poetic author, John Greenleaf Whittier, often experienced the darkness of the emotional night and went for weeks at a time in the depths of blackness and inner self-doubt. One wonders how a poet in those depths could write lyrics of such splendor until you realize that he could write as he did because of the agonies he knew and of the Lord who had accepted him as he was and redeemed him to be what by God's grace he could become. John Bunyon, whose *Pilgrim's Progress* ranks as one of man's greatest literary works, stands as another whose mind and emotions plunged the depths of despair.

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Historians tell us that Abraham Lincoln was frequently seen at night through a window, pacing the floor within the White House, gripped by a terrible attack of melancholy. Sir Winston Churchill, in his monumental writings, has referred to the 'black dog' of depression which often overwhelmed him with a sense of futility and hopelessness. The list is without end for no one is exempt from the motion as it manifests itself at one point or another in his pilgrimage through the nights and days, the months and the years of existence."³)

Only when we realize how common depression is can we begin to do something about it. Then people will accept it for what it is and seek help when needed. Depression is the most common mental disorder, yet it is one of the most frequently misunderstood. Preachers and other teachers can help people through the teaching of God's word which will provide comfort. F. B. Meyer once said that if he had a chance to live his life over again, he would preach more sermons of encouragement to people. Christianity is optimistic and full of hope. It should be an encouragement to Christians. This will never happen, however, unless we first realize how common depression is and begin to be more open and honest about it with one another.

2. Avoid those who discourage you. If you are not able to avoid such people, at least attempt to mentally block out their pessimistic influence. The story is told that at the siege of a certain city a civilian was arrested, court martialed, and sentenced to one year in prison for being a discourager. He would go up and down the lines saying discouraging words to the men on duty. He did not fight for the enemy or commit treason in the usual sense of the term, but his actions were considered a crime because of their effect. Unfortunately, there are many such people in the world and some in the

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ranks of the army of Christ. Avoid such people if you are able.

3. Seek those who speak encouraging words. The writer to the Hebrews advised his readers to "consider how to stir up one another to love and good works...encouraging one another" (Heb. 10:24-25). All of us need praise for a job well done. All of us need encouragement at certain times, so we should always make a practice of helping one another in this manner.

Once a man was watching a mother walking along the sidewalk with a little crippled boy. His legs were covered with steel braces up to his thighs. His walking was a pitiable hobble, but the actions of the mother kept him going. "That's good! That's fine! Why, you're doing splendidly!" she would say, and the little boy would work harder to please her. Then the man heard the little boy say, "Mommy, watch me; I'm going to run."

"Very well, darling, let me see you run," she encouraged. He ran as hard as he could, only making about three steps before his legs and braces became tangled up together. He would have fallen flat on his face, but his mother was there to catch him and hold him up. She kissed him and said, "That was fine! That was splendid! You can do better next time!" If only we could treat one another like this woman treated her little boy. People need encouragement and praise. Somewhere I read that the thing secretaries want most from their bosses is not more money, as we might expect, but appreciation for their work.

So many people are discouraged--with life, with Christianity, with their job, with their family, with everything--that anyone can perform a great service for others just by speaking encouraging words. If you are discouraged, seek out this type of person who will strengthen you.

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4. Learn from your failures and past mistakes.

Maltbie D. Babcock once wrote, "To have failed is to have striven, to have striven is to have grown." Instead of letting our failures defeat us through discouragement, we should learn from them. When you are depressed because of past defeats or failures, remember that the only human in this life who never fails is the one who never tries anything. At least you have tried. You cannot undo the past, so there is no use crying over spilled milk (as the expression goes). All of your past mistakes are like water under the bridge. As much as we might like to bring the past back and live it over, we cannot. We must take stock, learn from our mistakes and failures, and look to the future.

5. Realize that things could be worse. A suggestion such as this will often fall on deaf ears, for few when they are depressed can imagine things being any worse. If they do realize this, they may compound their depression and discouragement by adding new worry and anxiety to it. In most situations where one is discouraged, though, things could be worse. Very often people say the saddest words are, "It might have been." Someone, however, has remarked that we might also add to this the words, "It might have been a great deal worse." Furthermore, many of the things over which we worry and fret never materialize.

6. Remember that times of difficulty give opportunity for growth. It is said that Charles F. Kettering of General Motors had no pictures on the wall of his office. His brilliant young aides only had this saying to ponder:

Do not bring me your successes;
they weaken me.
Bring me your problems;
they strengthen me.

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Difficulties should not be considered an excuse to quit. They are not the end.

One writer put it well by saying, "Disappointment is like a sieve. Through its course meshes small ambitions and hopes and endeavors of the soul are sifted out relentlessly. But the things that are big enough not to fall through are not in the least affected by it. It is only a test, not a finality."

The fable is told of a king who placed a heavy boulder in the road to see who would remove it. He hid nearby and watched to see what would happen. Many men passed by and all worked their way around the stone, some cursing the king for not taking better care of the highways. None took upon himself the duty of removing the stone. Eventually a poor peasant approached, loaded down with vegetables for sale. He laid his load down and moved the stone out of the road. Underneath he found a purse full of gold pieces and a note from the king saying it was for the man that moved the stone.

In a similar way, what appears to be a difficulty can be the forerunner of a blessing. We never know what blessings lie on the other side of a valley of shadows, so we must continually plod onward.

7. Your present sorrows may bring future joys. In fact, someone wrote, "Life on earth would not be worth much if every source of irritation were removed. Yet most of us rebel against the things that irritate us, and count as heavy loss what ought to be rich gain." Then the illustration of the oyster was used by this writer. The irritating object is a grain of sand and this irritation prompts the oyster to produce a substance which makes a pearl. Thus, "A true pearl is therefore simply a victory over irritation. Every irritation that gets into our lives today is an opportunity for pearl culture."

8. Develop patience and perseverance. The old saying, "If at first you do not succeed, try again," is

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worth repeating here. When we are faced with discouragement or depression and have a desire to just quit, patience is needed very much. We, when depressed by failures or lack of progress, must remember that Rome was not built in one day. A little more determination might bring us the goals and success we desire. Quitting will never bring our dreams to fruition.

Norman Vincent Peale tells an inspiring story of Alfred P. Haake who became an outstanding public speaker through much patience and determination. He had many opportunities to say, "I'll quit; I'll give up," but he never did. His problem was that as a boy he stuttered very badly. Peale asked him how a boy who stuttered so pathetically had become a competent speaker. His answer was, "When we adapt ourselves to God's laws, changes occur within ourselves that seem miraculous, but which are simply the working of spiritually scientific principles." As a boy he had a lot of trouble in school due to his stuttering. In baseball games the other boys would call him "out" even if he was safe--just to make him angry so that he would stutter.

A change came about, though, when he attended a YMCA meeting in Chicago and heard a Senator from Indiana speak. This man challenged his young listeners to try to achieve great things. He said, "Young man, there isn't a thing in the world you cannot do if you believe you can." Haake felt that those words were for him. That day he accepted the challenge to overcome his stuttering. He told his mother about his hopes and dreams and she tried to caution him not to make his expectations too high. He prayed to God that night as he had never prayed before, without stuttering! The change did not come easily, though. He still stuttered. Boys would make fun of him and the girls would laugh. Inwardly, though, he now had a confidence that he could do

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it.

He read about how Demosthenes overcame a speech impediment by practicing speaking with stones in his mouth. Haake would go to the shores of Lake Michigan and fill his mouth with stones and practice. Each day he would practice with fewer stones. Then he would fall on his knees and pray to God for help. He continued to practice a lot and even to take public speaking lessons. He prayed and believed God would help him.

One day he made a complete speech without stuttering or hesitating and received an applause from his audience. He said that was the happiest day of his life. He continued to progress and make speeches at every chance. He told others of how he overcame his difficulty. He encouraged them to overcome their problems in a similar way through prayer, patience, and hard work.⁴⁾ If Haake had quit when he was discouraged, he would never have become the orator he became.

Another wonderful story Peale tells illustrates what persistence can accomplish. He tells of a young man who lived in a small town near Boston some years ago. He answered an ad in the newspaper that told of a job. He wrote the best letter he could describing his qualifications and his desire to work. Two weeks went by with no answer. He wrote a second letter. Two more weeks passed. He wrote a third letter. He received no answer. He had learned persistence, though, and would not quit.

He rode to Boston on a train and asked the postal clerk who owned Box 1720. The clerk told him that was confidential information. This did not stop him. He stood near Box 1720 for four hours. Eventually a man came along and took the mail out of that box. He then followed him halfway across the business section of Boston to an office of a brokerage firm. The boy asked the receptionist if he

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could see the manager. Eventually he was allowed to talk to the manager.

He told about the three letters he had written. He told about waiting near Box 1720 and following a man to the office. He said he wanted that job very much. The manager was impressed. He had never seen a young man with such determination and persistence. He gave him a job that very moment. That young man became very valuable to that firm. He received further training and ultimately became an extremely successful financial analyst.⁵⁾ He achieved this only through persistence.

9. If you quit, you may cause others to give up also. Though we do not usually like the responsibility, we must never forget that our actions and example continually influence others. While I was preparing this chapter the news media reported on the death of a young actor by suicide. It was a tragedy. A few days later, though, I heard of the death of a young teenage girl. She was depressed over her favorite actor's suicide and committed suicide also. We never know whom we may influence by our actions.

Once a young man took over a class of little boys in a mission Sunday school. He quickly won their love and dedication. The teacher, though, became depressed and very discouraged with his efforts. One Sunday he decided he should quit. He went to the building early to set his records in order. While sitting there he overheard a conversation he was not supposed to hear.

One little boy announced to some other boys that he was not coming any more. Since the teacher was going to quit, he was going to quit. Another little boy said, "The teacher is not going to quit. He said God is the boss and he would do what God said. He is God's man and he will not quit." The young teacher learned a lesson that day and continued to

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teach. He not only realized that he was doing some good, but he became aware that he had a tremendous influence over those boys. His quitting would cause some of them to quit too.

10. Realize that success is measured in many different ways. Too often people are depressed and discouraged, feeling that they have been a failure when actually they have done more good or achieved more than they realize. Success is measured in many different ways, and we must never be trapped into measuring success in the way the world measures it. We have often heard in connection with athletics, "It matters not whether you win or lose, is how you play the game that counts." This is true in life more than we sometimes realize.

The story of Ike Skelton illustrates the meaning of a real winner. Ike was a normal, healthy boy until he was stricken with infantile paralysis which left his arms dangling helplessly by his sides. His legs were fine, but he could not move his arms. He had a burning desire to run track, though. The coach at his school kindly told him it was impossible to run well without his arms. He needed his arms to run as much as he needed his legs.

Ike did not quit. He kept practicing all year. He never made the team. The next year he continued to run. The third year he tried again. Finally the last track meet of his school career arrived. It was against his school's biggest rival. Ike begged his coach to let him run in the two-mile race. The coach reluctantly agreed. He begged Ike not to be too disappointed. To keep his arms from flopping around while he ran, his coach tied them to his sides.

During the race everyone watched this strange looking runner with his arms tied to his sides. When the race was over, the crowd rushed onto the field and carried Ike off. Most were crying at his per-

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formance. Ike had won! He had not won the race. He finished last in the race, but he had won. He did not quit. He ran against his handicap and obtained the respect and admiration of every person there. He demonstrated a bold, undefeatable spirit. Later in life he became a very successful lawyer. Peale, who relates this story, then quotes the famous psychiatrist Karl Menninger as saying that men do not break down because they are defeated. They quit only because they think they are defeated.⁶⁾

11. Trust in the Lord. Whatever your problem may be, this is good advice. A beautiful example of this is the pericope in the gospels about the miraculous catch of fish. In this incident Jesus preached from a boat on the lake of Gennesaret. When he had finished preaching, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." Simon's reply was, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets. And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink" (Lk. 5:1-7).

One who trusted in God in the face of discouragement and depression was Jeremiah. He had the desire to quit and run away, shirking his duties as a prophet:

O that I had in the desert
a wayfarer's lodging place,
that I might leave my people
and go away from them! (Jer. 9:2).

Jeremiah's desire is the desire of many today. Preachers want to quit preaching. Christians want to quit attending church services. Elders become weary

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of their duties and responsibilities. Some become weary with life and wish to quit living. Jeremiah's wish and our wish often corresponds to that of the Psalmist who wrote,

O that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest;
yea, I would wander afar,
I would lodge in the wilderness,
I would haste to find me a shelter from
the raging wind and tempest."
(Psa. 55:6-8)

There are many things that helped Jeremiah through his years of numerous problems, but especially important was his reliance upon God. God sustained him. Even at the very beginning of his ministry as a prophet, God had promised to help him: "And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land. They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you" (Jer. 1:18-19).⁷

Another great man who knew depression and discouragement was Elijah. So often men and women become depressed soon after achieving some great success. The feeling is, "Where do I go from here?" This feeling often comes soon after graduation or retirement. Elijah had just achieved the greatest success of his life. On Mount Carmel he had challenged the priests of Baal. Through the help of God he had won a great victory for the truth that day and turned many people to the Lord (1 Kings 18). The events culminated in the death of four hundred prophets of Baal.

Ahab, however, told Jezebel of the events, and

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she sent a message to Elijah: "So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow" (1 Kings 19:2). Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. After running one whole day, Elijah asked the Lord if he might just die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers" (1 Kings 19:4). After running even further to a safer retreat he stopped in a cave. God's presence came to him and asked, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Kings 19:9-10).

Elijah's problem is like that of many today. He was very depressed and discouraged and wanted to give up and quit. Not only was Elijah depressed, but he had lost faith in other people. He felt he was the only faithful person left. The Lord brought Elijah back to his senses by telling him that at least seven thousand still had not bowed down to worship Baal. He taught Elijah not to be a bookkeeper of his successes and failures. He taught him to do the Lord's work and not be overly anxious in evaluating himself, for we never know how much good we have done when we think we have failed.

In preaching on Elijah, Clovis Chappell asked, "Have you ever had a feeling that you were of no account and never would be; that in spite of all that God had done for you, you were a failure? There are few things more fraught with heartache and bitterness and discouragement than that. That is something that makes you want to sob and give over the fight utterly. And there are a lot of folks that allow themselves to come to that dismal conviction. They work, and nobody seems to appreciate it. They

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toil, and nobody compliments them. They decide that they do not amount to anything, and they feel like giving over the fight....

"One of the sanest things I ever heard was spoken by an able preacher who came one day to preach in my town. There was almost nobody out to hear him. And he preached a wonderful sermon and closed with this most sensible word: 'I don't know what I have accomplished by coming to this town. I only know that I have come with God in my heart and have done my best. I am not keeping books. God is doing that. Some day on the other side of the River I am going to take down my book and look at it,--God will let me,--and I am going to see just what I accomplished when I came to your town.' That is sensible and that is religious.

"And so the Lord was saying to Elijah: 'It is not your business to keep books. You do not know how to keep them, in the first place. You added up a column of figures and got zero. I added it up and got 7,000. Yes, there are 7,000 that have not bowed the knee to Baal. You have been a help. You have been an inspiration. You have not been a failure, because you have walked with me.'

"...And so God's call to Elijah, and to you and to me is to leave off our heartbreaking bookkeeping, to put our hands in His and to resume the journey. And as we go we shall in some way shake off our discouragement as a hampering garment and we shall find ourselves in the sunlight once more."**8)**

Trust in the Lord and try not to be discouraged. Faith in God in the hours of darkness that surround despair, depression, discouragement, a sense of failure, and the desire to quit can often sustain you better than anything else in the world.

When (God knows) I'm tost about,
Either with despair or doubts;

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Yet before the glass be out,
Sweet Spirit comfort me!**9)**

The Thorn of Inferiority

Is it possible that Paul's thorn in the flesh was a magnified inferiority complex? Some did ridicule Paul (2 Cor. 10:10), but these were probably attacks on his speaking ability and his lack of a forceful presentation. One early tradition in the **Acts of Paul and Thecla** said that Paul was "a man little of stature, thin haired upon the head, crooked in the legs...[he had] a nose somewhat hooked..." (2. 3). Rather than being a possible explanation of an inferiority complex, this may be a complimentary description of Paul as a leader according to current proverbs about generals.

Speculation about Paul's personality will continue until the return of Christ. His psychological makeup, his sudden conversion, and his approach to religion have always been very intriguing to students of the word of God. If Paul had a magnified inferiority complex or shame over his physical appearance, this is not likely his thorn in the flesh. It is difficult to picture Paul praying to God to change his physical appearance. An inferiority complex is a problem for many in the world today, though. Some people feel inferior because of their physical looks, their lack of strength, the quality of their voice, their lack of agility, their social background, the color of their skin, their lack of education, or a host of other reasons. Some parents treat their children in a manner that leads to inferiority and insecurity. Some parents continually tell their child, "You are no good. You can never do anything right. You will never learn." A child who is treated this way will likely grow up with feelings of insecurity and low

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self-esteem. Inferiority is a very timely topic.

One man had a slight problem with stammering ever since he was a child. It was not very noticeable, and some people thought it gave him a unique and attractive eloquence. To him it was a great annoyance and a humiliation. He was certain that he shared the same problem that Paul had. He was so convinced of this that when he wrote his father on 21 May 1865, he said, "I have felt the benefit of our trip even more the last day or two than when you left; and have lost the aggravated tendency to stammering, which, while it lasted, was a severe thorn in the flesh."¹) Many people suffer, usually quietly, from a thorn of inferiority or inadequacy.

Before dealing with the problem of inferiority, we should remind ourselves that pride is a much more common problem. Even false humility is common enough that we should be careful that we do not deceive ourselves. Adam and Eve were appealed to partly on the basis of pride. The serpent encouraged them to eat the fruit in order to be like God (Gen. 3:5). The Tower of Babel tale is a story of sinful pride. In fact the emphasis upon pride and its converse humility in the Bible is unparalleled in the religions of the world.²) The greatest of all virtues, love, is devoid of pride (1 Cor. 13:4-5). Salvation by grace is a negation of pride (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3:27). We are told more than once in the Bible that "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Prov. 3:34; Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5).

Some writers claim that research psychologists are giving abundant evidence that pride is pervasive in man.³) For example, we are more willing to accept responsibility for our successes than our failures. When we do good, it is because of our ability, talent, skill, and wisdom. When we do poorly, it is due to bad luck, unfairness by others, or the impossibility of performing the task to begin

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with. If you ask a coach or an athlete why they won, they will tell you about their skill. If you ask why they lost, you will probably hear tales of poor calls by the umpire. If you win at a game, you believe you are skillful. If you lose, you likely attribute the loss to bad luck, rotten rolls of the dice, or some similar excuse.

Through the years I have talked to dozens of individuals or couples who are either having marriage problems or have already gotten a divorce. I have yet to meet many guilty parties. The problem in the marriage was usually the other person's fault. If you break up a fight between two boys on a playground, each of them will likely blame the other for the fight. When there are problems in a congregation, the elders will often blame it on the preacher, the preacher on the deacons, and the deacons on the elders. If the church is peaceful and growing, each of these might secretly praise themselves as the cause of the success.

God, of course, is aware of the tendency toward pride in man. When the children of Israel were about to go into battle against the Midianites, he told Gideon that his 32,000 man army was too big. The fearful were allowed to go home. This reduced the army to 10,000. This was still too big. After a test on how they drank water, apparently to test their alertness, the army was reduced to a paltry 300 men. This was finally small enough. When the army was numbered in the thousands, God told Gideon, "The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, 'My own hand has delivered me'" (Judges 7:2). Only when the odds against them were ridiculous would God allow them to fight. These odds were made necessary by typical human pride which is always eager to claim credit for victory.

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Another evidence of the pervasiveness of pride is how favorably we usually rate ourselves. When people are asked if they are below average, average, or above average, the overwhelming response is, "I am above average." In one survey among high school seniors, they were asked how they rated themselves in athletic ability. Sixty per cent claimed to be above average with only six per cent below average. In leadership ability seventy per cent perceived themselves as above average while only two per cent admitted to being below average. In their ability to get along with others sixty per cent rated themselves in the top ten per cent while twenty-five per cent claimed to be in the top one per cent! Clearly the typical high school senior is not lacking in self-esteem. Arrogance seems to be more of a problem.⁴) Similarly ninety-four per cent of a group of college professors in one test rated themselves as above average. Pride is very pervasive.

Another evidence of pride is how we usually overestimate how desirably we would act. When we are given a hypothetical situation, we usually predict that we would act in honorable ways. History, though, demonstrates that humanity is dreadfully wicked. In certain situations humans will do unspeakable acts of inhumanity to others. We are overconfident of our integrity. In one survey almost fifty per cent of those polled said they would volunteer three hours time for an American Cancer Society drive if they were asked. When a comparable group in that town was asked, only four per cent agreed to help.

There are many other evidences of how widespread pride really is. We tend to justify every act we do. If we did it, we assume it must be correct. Even self-disparaging remarks may be due to pride masked under false-humility. If we put ourselves down before others, this might be done merely to

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receive a reassuring denial from another person.⁵) If we talk about how ugly we think we are, a friend might deny this with compliments about our beauty or good looks. What appears to be a low self-esteem may be pride looking for praise. If we responded to such comments by saying, "Yes, you are as ugly as a toadstool," we would probably never hear such a comment from that person again. Pride, then, is a flaw present in all accountable persons.

Even the emphasis by some exegetes of scripture upon the importance of self-love is flawed. It is commonly asserted that Jesus commanded us to love ourselves and that self-love is necessary in order to be able to love others. Jesus, though, did not command us to love ourselves. Rather he assumed some form of self-love and used that as a guideline for how we should love our neighbor (Lk. 10:27). We love ourselves in the sense that we seek after our own welfare (Eph. 5:29), even though due to sin we sometimes follow carnal paths to attain a perverted welfare.⁶) Love of self in the sense of self-worship or self-centeredness is wrong (2 Tim. 3:2, 4). Self-love should be devoid of pride and arrogance in order to be acceptable.

Although pride has been viewed as the basic problem of man in the past, in recent years there has been more emphasis upon the opposite problem. With current stress upon self-help, a lot has been written and said about helping individuals improve their own self-esteem. An inferiority complex or a lack of self-esteem is a frequent problem. If a person does not think well of himself, he will often react in a hostile way toward others.

One illustration of this current tension is the debate between followers of Niebuhr and Rogers. For Niebuhr sin can be summed up primarily as pride. Pride is the most basic definition of sin.⁷) From theological circles there have been protests

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against this approach as an oversimplification of sin. It is claimed that there is no single motivation for sin, and that a lack of humility may not always be the reason for one's bondage to sin.⁸⁾ In particular the psychologist Rogers challenged the thought of Niebuhr that pride is the prime root of sin. He contended that the chief problem with people was a lack of self-love.⁹⁾

We seem to be caught in a dilemma. Pride is a widespread problem. It may not be the only motive for sin, but it is more prevalent than sinful man wants to admit. At the same time there is a need to help certain individuals learn to like themselves, even to love themselves. How can we help a person to raise his self-esteem without falling into the trap of a self-centeredness or an idolatrous self-love? Many approaches to raising one's self-esteem may build the ego, but they also can lead to arrogance.

To build our self-esteem without becoming proud, we must first realize what we are in comparison to God. We must begin, not with a false humility, but with a sober awareness that we are nothing in comparison to God. We are finite, limited, weak, sinful, and rebellious. God is infinite, eternal, almighty, perfect, and sinless. This sounds backwards, but to build our self-esteem we must begin with a sober awareness of our spiritual poverty. The teachings of Jesus always seemed backwards compared to that of the world. The gospel is contradictory to the wisdom of this present age. The beatitudes of Jesus seem non-sensical to the non-Christian, or paradoxical at best. This is why the path to self-respect without pride begins by accepting ourselves as nothing before God.

Next, in order to gain self-esteem without pride we should look at ourselves under grace. What is our worth in God's eyes?¹⁰⁾ Jesus gave great value to the individual. He said, "Look at the birds of the

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air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Mt. 6:26; cf. Mt. 12:12). Add to this the willingness of Jesus to accept the outcasts, the lowest of society.¹¹) More importantly, we should examine the mission and death of Jesus. He left the glories of heaven and emptied himself, taking on the form of a servant (Phil. 2:5-11). As a suffering servant he gave his life, not for worthy, righteous saints, but for sinners (Rom. 5:6-10). How valuable is an individual? Valuable enough for the Son of God to come to this world and die as a ransom in his place (Mk. 10:45).

If we look to grace as a starting point for finding our self-worth, we will avoid the trap of arrogance and pride. Furthermore, we will also realize the worth of every other individual. Hopefully this will lead us to a more accepting attitude rather than one of conceit. True humility begins by admitting our creatureliness and spiritual poverty. High self-esteem should follow the same path through the doctrine of grace.

Let us look at two examples of self-confident individuals. One is guilty of the sin of pride. The other overcomes this through grace. The first is a fictitious character, yet symbolic of someone we all know. This man is rich and his land produces plentifully. He runs out of storage, so he decides to build bigger barns. Note the way he uses the first person (I, my) eleven times: "What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops? I will do this; I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years" (Lk. 12:16-20). This man would be a model of self-confidence and esteem for many today, but God called him a fool. In his arrogance he thought he was self-sufficient. His over-confi-

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dence caused him to forget how insignificant he was compared to God. This type of self-love we can do without.

The next individual begins in a similar manner. He is bold, daring, and self-confident. He is not plagued with an inferiority complex. His name is Peter, and he is always at the front of the small band of disciples speaking first, jumping in the water, or making bold claims. When he is told that he is going to fall away due to fear, he boldly declares, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away" (Mt. 26:33). After falling away and then denying Jesus three times, Peter apparently learned some lessons from the crucifixion and resurrection.

I may be reading too much into certain passages, but I detect a non-arrogant self-confidence in the post-resurrection Peter. Even though Paul had rebuked him to his face (Gal. 2:11), Peter was able to call Paul "our beloved brother." He said Paul wrote "according to the wisdom given him." He even called the writings of Paul "scripture" (2 Pet. 3:15-16). A truly self-confident person is not threatened by other talented people. An executive who has self-confidence will surround himself with the most talented people he can find. This will only help him, not hurt him. Likewise, rather than the brash, arrogant Peter we know from the gospels, he seems quietly full of self-esteem. He feels no need to press his claims for authority and is happy to simply call himself "a fellow elder" (1 Pet. 5:2). I believe this is evidence of a man who is humbled by the grace of God which accepted him back after he denied Jesus three times. His self-esteem is as high as ever, but the pride is gone.

How do we raise our self-esteem? We raise it by examining the grace of God. Where do we find our confidence? We find it not in an arrogant claim to

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self-sufficiency but in Christ. Rather than celebrating yourself, celebrate what you are in God's grace. Rather than boasting of what you have attained by your own efforts, boast of the cross of Jesus Christ. Be like Paul who said, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10). "Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor. 3:4-5). Rather than attempting to walk through life with faith only in yourself, put your faith in God.

When it's me I can not bear,
Help me Lord to know you care;
Mend my heart; my soul repair;
Sweet Spirit comfort me.

The Thorn of Pain and Suffering

The day is cold, and dark, and dreary;
It rains, and the wind is never weary;
The vine still clings to the mouldering wall,
But at every gust the dead leaves fall,
And the day is dark and dreary.

My life is cold, and dark, and dreary;
It rains, and the wind is never weary;
My thoughts still cling to the mouldering Past,
But the hopes of youth fall thick in the blast,
And the days are dark and dreary.

Be still, sad heart! and cease repining;
Behind the clouds is the sun still shining;
Thy fate is the common fate of all,
Into each life some rain must fall,
Some days must be dark and dreary.

-- Henry W. Longfellow

One certainty of life is that there is plenty of pain and suffering. Buddha built a new religion by trying to give an answer to this problem. He taught that pain and existence go together. The only way to avoid pain is to break out of the cycle of existence. Every religion has something to say about the problem of pain. In the Bible we are reminded that life is full of suffering: "Man is born of trouble" (Job 5:7). One man came to his minister saying he had finally found a verse in the Bible that described him. The verse was Job 5:7. Later in Job we are told, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). "He feels

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only the pain of his own body" (Job 14:22).

An additional complication is that pain and suffering come to the righteous just as frequently as to the unjust. The case of Job is one example. Gideon is another example. During his life the children of Israel were being persecuted by the Midianites. They attacked them, stole their crops and livestock, and destroyed what was left. When an angel came to deliver a message to Gideon, he was in a winepress beating out grain. This shows how low he was in two ways. The winepress would not hold a large amount of grain, so this implies a small harvest. Secondly, he was probably beating out his grain there to avoid detection by the Midianites. Usually this work was done on a hill top where the wind would blow. The work would be much more difficult in a winepress which was cut out of rock. This helps us to understand the confusion Gideon felt when the angel announced, "The Lord is with you." He asks, "Pray, sir, if the lord is with us, why then has all this befallen us?" (Judges 6:12-13). That is how many Christians feel today when bad things happen to them.

Sometimes this question is referred to as the problem of evil, but here we are less concerned with the existence of sin and more concerned with pain and suffering. The technical term for this problem is "theodicy" which is the effort to justify God's way of dealing with the world. The problem is an apparently inconsistent triangle of three truths: (1) God is good, (2) God is omnipotent, and (3) evil, pain, and suffering exist. 1) Any two of these can be affirmed at one time without any apparent inconsistency, but once the third is added, difficulties arise.

If God is good and omnipotent, then there should be no evil, pain, or suffering in the world. Since evil exists, either God is not good or else he is not

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able to prevent it. There are attempts to avoid this dilemma by removing one corner of the triangle. Some deny that God is omnipotent. This is done in a thoroughgoing dualism where another god is given equal or similar power. Some deny that God is totally good. Still others refuse to admit that evil and pain exists. For some pain is merely an illusion. Christian thought, though, has always affirmed all three of these truths. Rather than deny one corner of the triangle, we need to see if these three truths are really irreconcilable with one another.

Although we are primarily talking in the abstract, this is a personal problem that is even more difficult to explain when it happens to us. We might be able to give a rationalization on paper or in a Sunday school class, but it is much more difficult when we lose a child to death, when we watch a relative waste away with cancer, when we have a loved one die in a car accident, when we have a friend who is the victim of a violent crime, when we witness the horrors of war, or when we experience a terrible disaster like a tornado or a fire.

Even though this problem is confronted on a personal, emotional level quite often, we need to answer the dilemma of pain and suffering with intellectual integrity.²⁾ Even though we may not have all of the answers, it is not enough to simply dismiss a problem such as this as being a mystery we can not understand. An answer to the thorn of pain and suffering begins with a better understanding that there may be a purpose to pain. We usually live as if happiness in life depends upon an absence of pain and suffering. We live on the wrong assumption that God is being unloving to us to allow bad things to happen to us.

Let us look at four examples of wrong thinking about God.³⁾ An Englishman in India had a brother

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who was wounded in a war. He prayed that his brother would live. He thought any decent person would listen and help him if they could. His brother died. He then declared that he no longer believed in God. In China a woman had a sister that suffered very much in childbirth. She wanted to know why God did not spare her from that suffering. A professor at a large university in America was knocked down by a truck. His leg was broken. At the first chapel service he attended after the accident, he announced that he no longer believed in God. If there had been a God, surely he would have whispered in his ear to get out of the way. Finally, at a religious meeting in India, an Indian stood up and declared, "Since I have become a Christian I have had no more troubles at all. God has saved me from all my troubles." He sat down with a satisfied look on his face.

What is wrong with the attitude of all four of these individuals? Two no longer believed in God. One merely doubted. The other believed God was protecting him. All four were working with the assumption that God should spare the righteous, them in particular, from pain and suffering. They all believed that God either should or did intervene and prevent bad things from happening to people. Is not this attitude the reason that faith healing continues to be a popular alternative for some people today, despite the absence of any evidence that faith healers truly heal any person except those with psychosomatic illnesses. In all of these examples the gospel is being viewed in a selfish way. It serves selfish ends, bringing us peace of mind, freedom from anxiety, and material prosperity.⁴⁾ If we have faith, we think all of our problems should go away. Even the cross, the chief symbol of Christianity, has become a symbol to be used to avoid pain, suffering, and sacrifice. Yet, what does the cross

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represent? Is it not pain, suffering, and sacrifice?

A more mature approach, and a less selfish one, is to affirm that it may be God's will that we suffer. This does not mean that all suffering is a punishment for sin. The causes of suffering are many.⁵⁾ Such suffering, though, may be the will of God and have some value for us. A minister was visiting the home of a young couple one time. The woman had severe arthritis in her legs and hips. This made it difficult and painful for her to take care of her young children. This couple had been attending a prayer group for a long time. They had prayed long and hard that God would remove this suffering from her. He had not done so. Now the couple was beginning to experience spiritual doubts. When the minister suggested to them that God might be saying, "No," to their prayers, and that it might be his will that she have this disease, the couple was quite startled and shocked.⁶⁾

One good example of a mature approach to the problem of pain and suffering is the choice of articles by the editor of the August 1972 edition of 20th Century Christian magazine which had the theme of "How to Conquer Suffering." The first article was entitled "Prayer Saved My Son from Cancer." This was not an article about miracles or faith healing. The son was in the hospital. He underwent surgery, but the author believed God's providence was at work also. The second article was entitled "My Son Died of Cancer."⁷⁾ Having these two articles side-by-side showed great wisdom. Being a Christian should not mean that we attempt to avoid all pain and suffering by virtue of our relationship to Christ, but that we are able to live through our suffering victoriously if God does not choose to deliver us from it.

One time a minister went to visit a woman who was afflicted with many problems. Her husband had

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gone blind and then been struck with an incurable disease. She had a light stroke, so she was forced to retire from her job and become a "seeing-eye wife." As the visiting minister tried to encourage her, he told her he was praying for her. She asked, "What are you praying for God to do?" He struggled for an answer. When he finished she thanked him and asked that he pray for one more thing: "Pray that I won't waste all of this suffering."⁸) She knew her problems were not going to miraculously disappear, so she wisely asked for the strength to endure them and to learn from them.

Paul had a thorn in the flesh which may have been a bodily ailment that brought him pain and suffering. He prayed to God three times to remove it, but God never did. In Hebrews 11 we read of many great heroes of the faith, some of whom God delivered. Others, though, were not delivered. They had to suffer mockings, scourgings, chains, imprisonments, stonings, being sawn in two, being killed by the sword, and being destitute, afflicted, and ill-treated. So an answer to the problem of pain and suffering that has some intellectual integrity can begin by affirming that pain and suffering may have some positive good or benefit. They may be part of the larger plan of God which is for our good.

Pain, for example, is a warning device to the body and the mind. Lepers who lose their sense of feel suffer much more horribly without it. Yet sometimes the amount of pain seems all out of proportion to the danger involved. A terrible pain may warn us of something with little danger. Likewise, some great danger may be accompanied by a very minor pain. A toothache can be extremely painful, but at the same time it might not be very dangerous. From another viewpoint, what good would the warning pain of appendicitis do a person in the Middle Ages who did not have the benefits of

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modern surgery and medicine?

Our world needs law and order, though, in order to be stable. We can not have water suddenly turning to air every time a person is about to drown. It would not work if gravity suddenly stopped everytime a person started falling to the ground.⁹⁾ Such a world would not be real. Everyone would end up being a "rice Christian," to use the old missionary phrase. There would be no virtue, no struggle, no heroes, and no character. Was not this the claim that was made against Job? Satan insinuated that the only reason Job worshipped God was because God cared for and protected him. If these blessings were removed, Job would not stay faithful (Job 1:9-11). Job demonstrated true virtue, though, not just an enlightened selfishness.¹⁰⁾

Sometimes pain and suffering may be discipline. One time a farmer watched a bird building a nest in a pile of branches. He went over and tore it up, scattering it everywhere. The mother bird immediately began building a new nest in the same spot. The farmer tore up this nest the next day. The third day the bird began building a nest in a rosebush near his house. He smiled and left her alone. A few days later he carried out his plans to burn the pile of branches. If the farmer had not brought a little pain into the mother bird's life, she would never have hatched her eggs.

There are many other possible positive purposes to pain and suffering.¹¹⁾ Suffering can help us to know ourselves. It can help us to attain a proper set of values about what is truly important in life. Due to suffering we will often become thankful for our blessings. Suffering can help us to avoid self-pity. Suffering will motivate us to be more sensitive and sympathetic toward others. Suffering will help us to learn the value of prayer. Suffering may cause us to repent and turn to God. Suffering will help us better

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see our own weakness in contrast to the strength of God. Suffering can develop understanding and resourcefulness, assurance, and discipline in the sufferer.

In one beautiful Old Testament passage Moses compares the care of God for Israel to that of an eagle for its baby:

He found him in a desert land,
and in the howling waste of the wilderness;
he encircled him, he cared for him,
he kept him as the apple of his eye.
Like an eagle that stirs up its nest,
that flutters over its young,
spreading out its wings, catching them,
bearing them on its pinions.

(Deut. 32:10-11)

Maybe Moses had witnessed actions by an eagle during his days of tending sheep in the wilderness. A mother eagle will literally push a baby eagle out of the nest and let it drop for fifty or one hundred feet. Before any harm can come to the little one, the mother will fly underneath and allow the baby to land on her shoulders. She will place the baby back in the nest for a few minutes and repeat the process over and over. It might appear cruel, but this is necessary to teach the baby eagle to fly. Otherwise that baby will never leave the nest. It will sit in the nest expecting to be fed the rest of its life. Suffering which comes our way may appear cruel to us, but it may be necessary to mold us into what God would have us to be.

One time a boat was travelling on the St. Lawrence River when it moved into a dense fog. Some of the passengers became frightened. They were certain that a wreck was imminent and demanded that the captain stop the vessel. One of

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the crew calmed them down. He informed them that the captain was at the mast of the ship which was several feet above the water where there was no fog. He could see perfectly clear where they were going. If we could rise up and see things from a higher perspective as God sees them, then maybe we would better see that there is a plan and purpose to our suffering. As Paul said, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Pain and suffering are not necessarily evil or wrong. They can be redemptive.

Once we have attempted to give a rationale to the problem of pain and suffering which has some intellectual integrity, we should balance this with a realization that we live by hope, not just by explanations.¹²⁾ While our explanation for the problem of pain and suffering should not simply be that God's ways are difficult for us to understand, sometimes we must make this appeal. While calling suffering a mystery beyond finite human minds is not a complete solution to the problem, it may be a part of it. In the Bible some great heroes question God about human suffering. Some of them are not given a logical resolution of the matter. They are given something else, though, which settles the matter for them.

Job had a lot of questions to ask God about why he had suffered so terribly. He would not be silent:

Therefore I will not restrain my mouth;
I will speak in the anguish of my spirit;
I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.
(Job 7:14)

Job would like to talk, even reason, with God concerning his suffering, but how can you debate with God? How can you initiate negotiations with God

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(Job 9:3-35)? If Job could only be given a fair hearing, he is certain that he would be declared innocent:

Behold, I have prepared my case;
I know that I shall be vindicated.
Who is there that will contend with me?
For then I would be silent and die.
(Job 13:18-19)

Finally after long discussions between Job and his friends, God speaks to Job (Job 38:1-40:2). God does not answer the question of pain and suffering. He does not give a detailed explanation of why evil has come into Job's life in abundance. God primarily gives Job a vision of his wisdom, majesty, and glory. At first glance it appears that God has evaded the issue. He asks Job a lot of questions, but they are questions that teach and instruct. Though the cumulative effect of these questions is to make Job aware of his ignorance, at the same time they educate him.¹³) When God finished he gave Job a chance to respond. Job answered:

Behold, I am of small account;
what shall I answer thee?
I lay my hand on my mouth.
I have spoken once, and I will not answer;
twice, but I will proceed no further.
(Job 40:4-5)

God then speaks to Job again. God has shown Job his majesty in nature. Now God gets to the point. Just as Job is no match for God in ability to make judgements in nature, he is no match in making moral judgements:

Will you even put me in the wrong?

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Will you condemn me that you may be
justified?

Have you an arm like God,
and can you thunder with a voice like his?
(Job 40:8-9)

By looking at only a minute portion of history and the universe, does any human being have the right to claim that he could run the universe in a better manner than God has?

Job now gives his final answer to God. Again we must remember that God has not explained the problem of pain and suffering to Job. Instead he has given him something far greater. He has given Job a glimpse of his marvelous creation. He has allowed him to peek into the intricate harmony of the universe. If the world is so complex and marvelous, how much more so is the God who made it. Also it is important to Job that God has spoken to him. God has not condemned him as his friends have. God's willingness to reason with Job has given Job tremendous assurance and dignity.¹⁴) So Job is satisfied with God's answer:

I know that thou canst do all things,
and that no purpose of thine can be
thwarted....

Therefore I have uttered what I did not
understand,
things too wonderful for me which I did
not know.

(Job 42:2-3)

Sometimes we will have no explanations to satisfy our intellect. I do not understand why some babies are born with horrible deformities. I do not understand why some people are born mentally retarded. I do not understand why there are terrible

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diseases like leprosy. As we stand in the face of such questions, rational explanations may do us little good. At moments like that, we need what Job experienced. We need to restudy the Bible and renew our vision of God's majesty. Then in hope and faith maybe we can live with such questions and not lose heart. As one man said, "I had a million questions to ask God: but when I met Him, they all fled my mind; and it didn't seem to matter."¹⁵

Another example similar to Job is the case of Habakkuk. During his day there was much injustice, wickedness, and violence. He cried out to God for an answer. He begged to know when God would act (Hab. 1:2-4). God's answer perplexed Habakkuk even more. God told him he was raising up the Chaldeans to bring punishment (Hab. 1:5-11). Habakkuk had admitted to sin among God's people and was aware of a need for punishment, but how could God use the Chaldeans to do this? How could God use a more wicked nation to punish a less wicked one? How could God bear to even look upon the Chaldeans, much less raise them up for such a purpose (Hab. 1:12-13)?

The prophet takes a stand to watch for God's answer. God did not disappoint Habakkuk. He gave him an answer, telling him to write a vision upon tablets. Several woes are pronounced upon violent and wicked peoples (Hab. 2:6-19). In contrast to the idolatry and materialism, Habakkuk catches a glimpse of the majesty of God: "The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him" (Hab. 2:20). Habakkuk is then given assurance that God will come forth for the salvation of his people and judge the enemies of God's people (Hab. 3:1-15). Although Habakkuk is given an answer in that he sees a future vindication of the righteous, he is not given a complete solution to the problem of pain and suffering.

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As with Job, though, Habakkuk comes away from his experience with God with faith, hope, and confidence in the absolute justice of God. He expresses his absolute trust in God in one of the greatest faith statements in all of the scripture:

Though the fig tree do not blossom,
nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail
and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold
and there be no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.
God the Lord, is my strength;
he makes my feet like hinds' feet,
he makes me tread upon my high places.
(Hab. 3:17-19)

Even if their food supply is cut off by foreign invaders, Habakkuk will continue to praise God. God will allow him to climb to the tops of the mountains like a deer, taking him high above the valley of despair and doubt below. Instead of a "God, you take care of me, and I'll take care of you" attitude, Habakkuk rests confidently in trust of God.¹⁶ So while an attempt at a rational explanation of the problem of pain and suffering should be our beginning point, sometimes we must catch a glimpse of God's majesty and live by hope and trust, not explanations.

How should we live with pain and suffering? We can deny it as one religious group does, but it will not disappear. We can simply ignore it, but it will return. We can reject God and claim that we could do a better job of planning the universe. This proud reaction is quite common. We can sit back and accept it silently as a Stoic. We might accept it as

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the will of God, and then do nothing to alleviate pain and suffering in the world. In 1722 a sermon was preached by Edmund Massey against "the dangerous and sinful practice of inoculation." He said diseases such as smallpox were sent by God as a punishment for our sins, therefore it is wrong for us to attempt to prevent or wipe out such diseases by modern medicine.¹⁷ This passive reaction to pain and suffering always stands in the way of progress. We can accept pain in our lives and then live selfishly, or we can accept pain and suffering for what it is and live unselfishly. We can try to live with it and learn from it. We can try to build our character and be victorious over it. This is the way Jesus met pain and suffering.

Finally, to deal with pain and suffering in our life, we must learn to live together with others in our pain. Paul said, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). "Weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15). In the fellowship of the body of Christ we can find support and sympathy to help us in our period of pain and suffering.

When my life is filled with pain,
So my faith begins to wane;
And all answers seem in vain;
Sweet Spirit comfort me.

Suggested Reading

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Notes

CHAPTER 1 - PAUL'S THORN IN THE FLESH PAGES 1-12

1) For objections to treating these two passages together, see Terence Y. Mullins, "Paul's Thorn in the Flesh," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76 (Dec. 1957):300-301. Other passages may also allude to the same ailment, but they will not be noted in detail (e.g. 1 Cor. 2:3; 4:10; 2 Cor. 1:4-9; 2:4; 5:4; 7:5; Gal. 6:17).

2) William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 763; Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, I.C.C. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), p. 349; Gerhard Delling, "skolops," *T.D.N.T.*, 7, pp. 409-413; David M. Park, "Paul's Skolops Te Sarki: Thorn or Stake? (2 Cor. xii 7)," *Novum Testamentum* 22 (April, 1980), 179-83.

3) James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (1930); reprint ed., Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 578.

4) Park, "Paul's Skolops," p. 179n.

5) Philip E. Hughes, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, N.I.C.N.T. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 446; and Karl Ludwig, "kolaphizo" *T.D.N.T.*, 3, pp. 818-21.

6) Alan Hisey and James S. P. Beck, "Paul's 'Thorn in the Flesh': A Paragnosis," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 29 (April 1961):125-29. This study does not take into account the fact that others witnessed the light from heaven while on the road to Damascus (Acts 22:9), and others may have heard the heavenly voice (Acts 9:7).

7) Mullins, "Paul's Thorn," pp. 299-303.

8) Montague Rhodes James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1924), p. 273.

9) See F. W. Farrar, *The Life and Work of St. Paul* (London: Cassell, Potter, Galpin & Co., n.d.), 2, pp. 628-29; and H. R. Minn, *The Thorn That Remained* (Auckland, New Zealand: By the author, 1972), pp. 38-40.

10) Robert M. Grant, "The Description of Paul in the Acts of Paul and Thecla," *Vigiliae Christianae* 36 (1982):1-4.

11) Plummer, *Second Corinthians*, p. 350; Hughes, *Second Corinthians*, p. 444. In recent Catholic discussion, there are dissenting voices to this view. See R. V. C. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, Tyndale (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1958), pp. 176-77; Edward A. Morgan, "Was Saint Paul An Invalid?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 5 (1943):68-72; Joseph L. Lilly, "The Conversion of Saint Paul," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 6 (1944):180-204; Dorothy E. Donley, "The Epilepsy of St. Paul," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 6 (1944):358-60; and Joseph L. Lilly, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 7 (1945):108-109.

12) J. J. Lias, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, *The Cambridge Bible for Schools* (Cambridge: University Press, 1882), pp. 17-18.

13) W. M. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire* (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1893), pp. 62-66; W. M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897; reprint ed.,

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Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1960), p. 96; W. M. Ramsay, *A Historical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1899), pp. 423f.

14) 1 Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18; Rom. 16:22; 2 Thess. 3:17; Phile. 19. See Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 14-15, 190-192.

15) Arndt and Gingrich, *Lexicon*, p. 244; Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary*, p. 198; Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, I.C.C. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 242; Farrar, "Excursus X. St. Paul's 'Stake in the Flesh,'" *Life and Work of St. Paul*, I, p. 658n; Heinrich Schlier, "ekptuo," *T.D.N.T.*, 2, pp. 448-49.

16) J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians* (Reprint edition; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), pp. 186-91).

17) Ramsay, *Historical Commentary on Galatians*, p. 427.

18) Hughes, *Second Corinthians*, p. 443. Used by permission.

19) *Ibid.*, pp. 442-43.

20) *Ibid.*, p. 442.

21) Cited by Neil Gregor Smith, "The Thorn that Stayed," *Interpretation* 13 (October 1959):411.

22) *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 2 - THE THORN OF DOUBT

PAGES 13-21

1) Jack Exum, *This Will Kill You!* (Dallas, Texas: Exum Publications, n.d.), p. 38.

2) See John T. Willis, "Prove All Things," *Firm Foundation*, 30 June 1981, pp. 7, 12; and 7 July 1981, pp. 7, 11, for an extended discussion of the meaning of this verse.

3) Jack F. Paul, "The Role of Doubt in Faith," *Harding College Lectures 1971* (Austin, Texas: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1971), pp. 154-55. Used by permission.

4) Exum, *This Will Kill You*, p. 40.

5) Chark H. Pinnock, *Set Forth Your Case* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), p. 13.

6) Paul, "Role of Doubt," p. 156.

7) John Kendrick Bangs, "Blind."

8) Robert Herrick, "In the Hour of My Distress."

CHAPTER 3 - THE THORN OF TEMPTATION

PAGES 22-39

1) William Barclay, *The Plain Man Looks at the Lord's Prayer* (London: Fontana Books, 1964), p. 113.

2) L. Nelson Bell, "The Grace to Say No!" *Christianity Today*, 12 March 1971, pp. 36-37. Used by permission.

3) Ronald D. Rife, "What to do About Thorns," *Christianity Today*, 17 Jan. 1975, p. 12. Used by permission.

4) Norman V. Hope, "Does God Lead Us Into Temptation?" *Christianity Today*, 4 July 1969, p. 13. Used by permission. At the end Hope is quoting from *On Being Fit to Live With*, p. 151.

5) An explanation of the origin of sin that stresses the psychological can be maintained along with a belief in a personal devil. For a good

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summary of a psychological approach, see Bob E. Patterson, Reinhold Niebuhr, *Makers of the Modern Theological Mind* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1977), pp. 83-98; L. Harold De Wolf, *A Theology of the Living Church* (Second Edition: New York: Harper & Row, 1968), pp. 190-96; and Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), pp. 178-86, 241-64.

6) Aeschylus, *Seven Against Thebes*, 593-95, cited by M. R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, in. loc.

7) D. G. Kehl, "The Devil's Electric Carrot," *Christianity Today*, 16 Feb., 1973, p. 19. Used by permission. Also see D. G. Kehl, "Sneaky Stimuli and How to Resist Them," *Christianity Today*, 31 Jan. 1975, pp. 9-12.

8) *Ibid.*, p. 20.

9) *Ibid.*, p. 18.

10) Hope, "Does God Lead Us Into Temptation?" p. 14.

11) Hermas, *Mandates* 12. 5. Translation by J. B. Lightfoot.

12) The LXX has skandalon here.

13) Hermas, *Mandates* 12. 5.

14) Robert Herrick, "In the Hour of My Distress."

CHAPTER 4 - THE THORN OF PERSECUTION PAGES 40-51

1) William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, *Daily Study Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955), 2, pp. 216-17. Used by permission.

2) Thomas Shepherd, "Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone?"

3) Isaac Watts. Title unknown to the author.

4) J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1879), p. 166.

5) *Ibid.*, p. 167.

6) Annie Johnson Flint, "Christ--And We."

7) The phrase "bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you" is added from Luke 6:27-28 and is not present in the earlier manuscripts of Matthew 5:44. Also the phrase "despitefully use you" is a later addition. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 14.

8) This information is from Arndt and Gingrich, *Lexicon*, pp. 653, 659; and Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, pp. 506, 510.

9) William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, *Daily Study Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), p. 43. Used by permission.

10) *Good News for Modern Man*. Third edition (New York: American Bible Society, 1971), p. 406.

11) Arndt and Gingrich, *Lexicon*, p. 659.

12) *Ibid.* Also Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, p. 510; and Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, in. loc.

13) Pierre Berton, *The Comfortable Pew* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1965), p. 80.

CHAPTER 5 - THE THORN OF GUILT PAGES 52-62

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- 1972, p. 6.
- 2) Ibid.
- 3) Dan Eubanks, "Unresolved Guilt in the Church (I)," Firm Foundation, 8 Feb. 1977, p. 7.
- 4) Paul Martin, "Sin, Guilt and Mental Health," The Christian Century, 21 May 1975, p. 525.
- 5) Ibid., p. 525.
- 6) Ibid., p. 527.
- 7) Norman Vincent Peale, A Guide to Confident Living (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1948), pp. 41-43.
- 8) Joel W. Hedgpeth, "Ocean," World Book Encyclopedia, 14 (Chicago: World Book, 1979), 490-503.
- 9) Cited in Walter B. Knight, Three Thousand Illustrations (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1947), p. 290. He gives no source. Kipling's statement about East and West is followed by the words, "But there is neither East nor West, border nor breed nor birth / When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the earth!" Ballad of East and West.
- 10) Robert Herrick, "In the Hour of My Distress."

CHAPTER 6 - THE THORN OF DISCOURAGEMENT PAGES 63-79

- 1) See my book What You Always Wanted To Know About Your Preacher, But You Never Cared Enough To Ask (Winona, Mississippi: J. C. Choate Publications, 1979).
- 2) Clyde M. Narramore, Improving Your Self-Confidence (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1961).
- 3) Donner B. Atwood, "The Christian Faith and Mental Depression: A Sermon," Reformed Review, 27 (Fall, 1973):5-6. This is an excellent sermon on the problem of depression.
- 4) Norman Vincent Peale, Stay Alive All Your Life (New York: Fawcett Publications, 1957), pp. 215-17.
- 5) Norman Vincent Peale, "You Don't Need to be Discouraged," Creative Help for Daily Living, 27, 7 (1976), pp. 20-22.
- 6) Norman Vincent Peale, Stay Alive All Your Life, pp. 97-98.
- 7) An excellent sermon on Jeremiah is the one by Clovis G. Chappell, "The Lure of the Wilderness--Jeremiah," Sermons on Old Testament Characters (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1924), pp. 18-28.
- 8) Clovis G. Chappell, "A Case of Blues--Elijah," Sermons on Biblical Characters (Reprint edition: Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1970), pp. 121, 126-28.
- 9) Robert Herrick, "In the Hour of My Distress."

CHAPTER 7- THE THORN OF INFERIORITY PAGES 80-88

- 1) Rickman J. Godlee, Lord Lister, p. 602, cited by The Speaker's Bible, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians (Aberdeen: The Speaker's Bible Office, 1933), p. 197.
- 2) D. H. Tongue, "Pride," New Bible Dictionary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 1027.
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- 4) Ibid., p. 1227.

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- 5) *Ibid.*, p. 1228.
- 6) John Piper, "Is Self-Love Biblical?" *Christianity Today*, 12 Aug. 1977, pp. 6-8; John R. W. Stott, "Must I Really Love Myself?" *Christianity Today*, 5 May 1978, pp. 34-35.
- 7) Reinhold Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man*, 1, pp. 186-87.
- 8) Harold De Wolf, *Theology of the Living Church*, pp. 183-86.
- 9) Bob Patterson, Reinhold Niebuhr, pp. 91-92.
- 10) John R. W. Stott, "Am I supposed to love myself or hate myself?" *Christianity Today*, 20 April 1984, pp. 26, 28; and Jack Exum, *This Will Kill You*, pp. 47-51.
- 11) For example, see Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Man From Nazareth* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), pp. 43-64, 120-61; I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1970), pp. 140-44; and Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1971), pp. 90-92.

CHAPTER 8 - THE THORN OF PAIN AND SUFFERING PAGES 89-102

- 1) Donald A. Hagner, "A Look at the Problem of Evil," *Christianity Today*, 26 Sept. 1969, pp. 10-12.
- 2) Warren W. Wiersbe, *Why Us? When Bad Things Happen to God's People*, (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Revell, 1984), p. 13.
- 3) E. Stanley Jones, *Christ and Human Suffering* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1933), pp. 17-18.
- 4) Smith, "The Thorn that Stayed," p. 415. Selfishness is more common than unselfishness. Materialism is more prevalent than spirituality. See Charles W. Colson, "A call to rescue the Yuppies," *Christianity Today*, 17 May 1985, pp. 17-20.
- 5) Various causes for suffering can be found in Thomas B. Warren, *A Sun and Shield for Troubled Hearts* (Fort Worth: Warren Publications, 1963), pp. 15-27; and Ralph W. Sockman, *The Meaning of Suffering* (New York: Woman's Division of Christian Service, 1961), pp. 1-19.
- 6) Ronald D. Rife, "What to do About Thorns," p. 11.
- 7) Malcom P. Hinckley, "Prayer Saved My Son from Cancer," *20th Century Christian*, August 1972, pp. 5-6; and Lorene E. Jones, "My Son Died of Cancer," *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.
- 8) Wiersbe, *Why Us?*, p. 101.
- 9) Cyril S. Dodd, "The Problem of Suffering--A Dialogue," *Expository Times* 83 (August 1972):342-44.
- 10) Wiersbe, *Why Us?*, p. 41.
- 11) Warren, *Sun and Shield*, chapter 5; and Hallock, *Meaning of Suffering*, pp. 66-92.
- 12) Wiersbe, *Why Us?*, p. 13.
- 13) Francis I. Anderson, *Job*, Tyndale (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), pp. 268-72.
- 14) *Ibid.*, pp. 271, 291.
- 15) Christopher Morley, *Inward Ho!*, cited by Wiersbe, *Why Us?*, p. 51.
- 16) Jack P. Lewis, *The Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1966), pp. 60-64; and Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1972), pp. 276-96.
- 17) Smith, "The Thorn that Stayed," p. 410.