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ROBERT K. SPRADLING JANUARY 3, 1982
A.M.

"HEARTFELT HELP FOR HARD TIME HURTS"
II CORINTHIANS 1:1-24

IN THE SPRING OF 57 A.D., FROM EPHESUS, PAUL WROTE I CORINTHIANS AND SCAULDED, SKINNED THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH, DEMANDING THAT THEY CORRECT PROBLEMS IN THE CHURCH. IN THE FALL OF THE SAME YEAR, HE WROTE THE SECOND EPISTLE TO SOOTHE AND COMFORT THE SAME CHURCH. TIMOTHY AND TITUS WERE BOTH DISPATCHED TO CORINTH TO HELP WITH THE PROBLEMS IN THE CHURCH. EVENTUALLY, TITUS MET PAUL AT PHILIPPI AND GAVE HIM THE GOOD NEWS THAT THE CHURCH WAS RESPONDING TO HIS DIRECTIVES. IN THE EARLY CHAPTERS OF THIS EPISTLE, ONE SENSES THE BURDENS OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY. WE LEARN THAT SAINTS LIKE PAUL ARE HUMAN, TOO. SIMPLY STATED, AN OUTLINE OF THE BOOK IS (1) THE GLORY OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY - CHAPTERS 1-7, (2) GIVING TO THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY - CHAPTERS 8-9, (3) GRACE AND THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY - CHAPTERS 10-13. ROBERTSON SAYS: "NOWHERE DO WE GAIN SO CLEAR INSIGHT INTO PAUL'S OWN STRUGGLES AND HOPES AS A PREACHER. IT IS A HANDBOOK FOR THE MODERN MINISTER OF INESTIMABLE VALUE." THE PROBLEMS AT CORINTH WERE OF GREAT CONCERN TO PAUL, HEAVY ON HIS HEART. HE WAS EXERCISED DEEPLY THAT THE SITUATION THERE MIGHT BE CORRECTED.

I. HELP FOR THOSE WHO NEED TO BE COMFORTED - VERSES 1-7

THE INTRODUCTORY VERSES ARE WELL-KNOWN TO MOST STUDENTS OF SCRIPTURE. THE WORD ACHAIA, A REMINDER THAT THE ROMANS HAD DIVIDED GREECE INTO TWO PROVINCES, THIS ONE AND MACEDONIA. THE WORD IN THE TEXT REFERS TO THE SOUTHERN HALF OF GREECE. THE WORD BLESSED IS THE GREEK EULOGETOS AND MEANS "TO SPEAK WELL OF". IT SEEMS TRITE TO SUGGEST THAT MEN SHOULD SPEAK WELL OF GOD, BUT AS A FACT OF LIFE MANY MEN DO NOT PRAISE OR SPEAK WELL OF HIS NAME! QUESTION: THIS WEEK, HAVE YOU HEARD GOD'S NAME TAKEN IN VAIN OR IN PRAISE MORE OFTEN? HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE YOU HEARD SOMEONE SAY, "PRAISE THE LORD"

IN A PUBLIC PLACE? HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE YOU HEARD SOMEONE THANK GOD FOR THE WONDERFUL DAY OF RAIN, SNOW, AND DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES? HAVE YOU HEARD ANYONE THANK GOD FOR THE BEAUTIFUL CHRISTMAS WEEK OF CLOUDLESS SKIES AND BEAUTIFUL DAYS? IN THIS LETTER, PAUL DIRECTS HIS PRAISE, NOT TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH, BUT TO THE GODHEAD. DR. IRONSIDE ENJOYED TELLING THE STORY ABOUT A WELSH PREACHER WHO USED TO SAY THAT IF GOD PUT HIM IN A BARREL HE WOULD SHOUT "GLORY TO GOD" OUT THE LITTLE HOLE IN THE SIDE. POVERTY DID STRIKE THAT FAMILY UNTIL THERE WAS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO EAT - THERE WAS NO FLOUR IN THE BARREL. SHE CHALLENGED HER HUSBAND TO PRACTICE WHAT HE PREACHED. AND SO HE DID JUST THAT, STUCK HIS HEAD IN THE BARREL AND SAID, "PRAISE THE LORD!" DAVID SAID: "I WILL BLESS THE LORD AT ALL TIMES; HIS PRAISE SHALL CONTINUALLY BE IN MY MOUTH." (PSALM 34:1)

GOD IS SAID TO BE THE GOD OF ALL COMPASSION. THE WORD IS PITY, THAT IS, GOD PITIES HIS CHILDREN. THE TERM IN LATIN MEANS "TO BRAVE TOGETHER". TEN TIMES IN THIS CHAPTER, GOD SPEAKS OF HIS COMFORT TO HIS OWN. THE WORD TRIBULATION MEANS AFFLICTION, AND OUR TEXT SPEAKS OF A MAN WHO KNOWS THE DIFFICULTY OF AFFLICTION WRITING TO THOSE WHO ARE PRESENTLY AFFLICTED! THE WORD PICTURE SURROUNDING THE WORD TROUBLE MEANS TO STRIKE OR CRUSH WITH WEIGHT; IN OTHER WORDS, THE IDEA OF PRESSURE. TRENCH REMINDS US THAT, IN ANCIENT ENGLISH LAW, ONE FORM OF PUNISHMENT WAS TO LAY HEAVY WEIGHTS UPON THE CHEST OF A VICTIM UNTIL HE WAS PRESSED OR CRUSHED TO DEATH. SOMETIMES LIFE STRIKES, BATTERS, BEATS, HURTS, AND CRUSHES PEOPLE. A PERSON MAY CARRY THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD IN HIS SOUL. PAUL SPOKE OF COMFORT AS ONE WHO HAD BEEN COMFORTED. ONE REASON WHY GOD COMFORTS US IS IN ORDER THAT WE MAY COMFORT OTHERS. SORROW AND AFFLICTION QUALIFY US TO MINISTER TO OTHERS. IT TAKES US OUT OF THE THEORETICAL INTO THE PRACTICAL AND EXPERIENTIAL. READING A BOOK ABOUT SUFFERING DOES NOT QUALIFY ONE TO HELP OTHERS SUFFER. SOMEONE HAS WELL SAID, "WE CANNOT LEAD OTHERS WHERE WE HAVE NOT BEEN OURSELVES." OFTEN, WE DESIRE TO BE COMFORTED IN

ORDER THAT WE MIGHT BE COMFORTED. THE BIBLE SAYS GOD HELPS US IN OUR AFFLICTION THAT WE IN TURN MAY HELP OTHERS. (COMPARE TO ALCOHOLISM.) IF YOU ARE A WIDOW, WIDOWER, AMPUTEE, HAVE LOST A BABY, HAD YOUR HOME BURNED, HAVE A TERMINAL SICKNESS, HAVE YOU EVER SOUGHT TO COMFORT OTHERS WHO ARE IN THE SAME SITUATION? TOO OFTEN, WE ARE SO GLAD TO GET THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE WITH ITS SCARS AND DIFFICULTIES THAT WE SOMETIMES MISS ONE OF THE PURPOSES OF AFFLICTION! GOD PASSES DOWN COMFORT IN ORDER THAT WE MAY PASS IT ON! THE MORE WE SHARE OUR EXPERIENCES WITH OTHERS, THE MORE HE SHOWERS HIS BLESSING UPON THE AFFLICTED! MANY PEOPLE DO NOT KNOW WHAT TO SAY OR DO IN TIMES OF SORROW. WHEN YOU HAVE BEEN THROUGH THE MILL, YOU KNOW WHAT TO SAY AND DO. (THE BEST COMFORTERS IN THE WORLD ARE MOTHERS. SHE SEEMS TO KNOW WHEN AND WHERE IT HURTS, AND HER WORDS AND ACTIONS ALWAYS MAKE IT BETTER.) IN TIMES OF SORROW, THERE ARE MANY COMFORTING THINGS: (1) THE BIBLE AND OTHER BOOKS, (2) OUR FAITH IN GOD, (3) FAMILY, (4) FRIENDS, TO MENTION BUT A FEW. IN AFFLICTION AND TROUBLE, WE DEVELOP SPIRITUAL MUSCLES AND COURAGE ALONG WITH SPIRITUAL RESOURCES ALL DESIGNED TO PRODUCE IN THE BELIEVER STABILITY. - VERSE 7. THE WORD "STEADFAST" MEANS TO "PLANT THE FEET". ARE YOU GOING THROUGH A TIME OF DEEP STRESS AND SORROW? HAS LIFE BECOME TOO GREAT A BURDEN TO BEAR? THE TRIUNE GOD IS WANTING, WAITING, AND WILLING TO ENTER IN TO OUR AFFLICTION AND BRING TO US ALL COMFORT. THERE IS NO BETTER SOURCE THAN GOD. HE MAY BE THE UNTAPPED SOURCE IN THE LIVES OF MANY LISTENERS TODAY.

II. HELP FOR THOSE WHO HAVE COME TO THE END OF THEIR ROPE - VERSES 8-11

THE WORLD SAYS, WHEN YOU COME TO THE END OF YOUR ROPE, TIE A KNOT IN IT AND HANG ON. THE PROBLEM ARISES CONCERNING HANGING ON, JUST HOW LONG CAN YOU HANG ON? SOMEONE HAS SAID WHEN LIFE IS COMPARED TO A ROPE, SOME PEOPLE USE IT TO MAKE A NOOSE IN ORDER TO GIVE UP, QUIT, THROW IN THE TOWEL, CHECK OUT ON LIFE. OTHERS

TAKE THE SAME ROPE, MAKE A LADDER, AND BEGIN CLIMBING! IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS CHAPTER, PAUL SPOKE OF LOOKING DEATH IN THE FACE. YOU AND I HAVE A TENDENCY TO EXAGGERATE AND LINGER OVER DIFFICULTIES IN OUR LIVES. IT IS A FACT OF LIFE THAT PEOPLE WHO SUFFER SEVERELY USUALLY DON'T SAY MUCH ABOUT IT! PAUL DID NOT PARADE HIS TRIALS FOR ALL TO SEE. HE SIMPLY STATES THAT HE HAD ENTERED INTO A DESPERATE, CRUSHING, OVERWHELMING CIRCUMSTANCE WHICH LEFT HIM UTTERLY POWERLESS IN THE THROES OF DEATH. IT WAS SOME KIND OF TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE IN ASIA, MAYBE THE RIOTS IN EPHESUS, THAT BROUGHT SO MUCH PRESSURE UPON PAUL THAT HE DESPAIRED EVEN OF LIFE ITSELF. THAT IS, HE WONDERED IF HIS LIFE WOULD BE SPARED. HE WAS BACK TO THE WALL, IN A CORNER, NO PLACE TO RUN, LOOKING DEATH SQUARELY IN THE FACE. (RELATE STORY OF POLICEMAN FRIEND WHO LOOKED DOWN THE BARREL OF A GUN - DICK YOST.) SOME HAVE HAD SIMILAR EXPERIENCES IN A HOSPITAL ROOM, WHERE YOU LIVE AND WORK.) QUESTION: HAVE YOU EVER DESPAIRED OF LIFE ITSELF, WONDERED IF LIFE WAS WORTH LIVING, WORTH THE EFFORT? MOST PEOPLE HAVE! WE LIVE IN A CRISIS-FILLED WORLD. PAUL'S ANSWER WAS THAT, WHEN HE WAS DRIVEN TO THE BRINK OF DESPAIR, THAT IN TURN DROVE HIM TO TRUST IN GOD AND NOT HIMSELF! (VERSE 9) IN THE FACE OF DEATH, PAUL FACED A BIBLE FACT THAT IT WAS GOD WHO COULD RAISE THE DEAD! IN VERSE 10, PAUL ALLUDES TO THE FACT THAT GOD DELIVERED HIM FROM THE PERIL OF DEATH AND WOULD DO IT AGAIN IF NECESSARY! PAUL'S FORMULA FOR VICTORY OVER LIFE'S CRISIS WAS THREE T'S - TRUST FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW. THE MAN WHO HAS UNSHAKEABLE CONFIDENCE IN GOD CAN AND WILL FACE ANY CIRCUMSTANCE IN LIFE TRIUMPHANTLY. WE SHOULD THANK GOD FOR ANY SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES, ANY PEOPLE WHO DIRECT OUR ATTENTION AWAY FROM OURSELVES AND OUR THINGS, AND PRESS US TOWARD SPIRITUAL GOALS AND TRUST IN GOD. DON'T TIE A KNOT AND HANG ON TO THE END OF THE ROPE; TURN LOOSE AND REST ON THE PROMISES OF GOD. THERE ARE SOME PLACES AND MOMENTS IN LIFE WHERE THERE SEEMS TO BE NO WAY OUT. IN THOSE TIMES, PEOPLE THINK OF SUICIDE, DRUGS, AND EXTREME MEASURES. IT IS SAD THAT WE DO NOT TURN TO THE GOD OF THE BIBLE IN THOSE MOMENTS OF

STRESS. (RELATE SEMINARY EXPERIENCE REGARDING FOUNDRY AND POVERTY. THAT EXPERIENCE IS MISSING TODAY, AND I AM THE LOSER.) LET US SUPPOSE THAT FOR SOME THERE IS NO DELIVERANCE FROM YOUR AFFLICTION; WHAT THEN? THE ANSWER IS IN VERSE 9, THAT WE TRUST IN THE GOD WHO RAISES THE DEAD. DEATH IS NOT THE END! (RELATE CONVERSATION WITH BOBBY HOWARD CONCERNING NOT THE LENGTH BUT THE FULLNESS OF LIFE. IT IS POSSIBLE TO PACK A LIFETIME INTO A FEW DAYS, WEEKS, MONTHS, OR YEARS BY THE GRACE OF GOD. RELATE RUTH GRAHAM'S COMMENT REGARDING LIVING WITH BILLY, RATHER A SHORT TIME WITH HIM THAN A LIFETIME WITH SOMEONE ELSE.) LET US TAKE WHAT GOD GIVES, SAVOR IT, AND USE IT FOR HIS GLORY. THE CHRISTIAN WHO HAS LEARNED THE VALUABLE LESSON OF PUTTING HIS FAITH IN GOD ALONE IS NO LOSER. THANK GOD FOR ANY CIRCUMSTANCE WHICH MAKES US TURN OUR EYES AWAY FROM SELF AND PITY TO THE GOD OF ALL GRACE AND ALL COMFORT.

III. HELP FOR THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN MISUNDERSTOOD AND MISJUDGED - VERSE 12FF

THERE WERE THOSE IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH WHO ACCUSED PAUL OF NOT REALLY CARING ABOUT THEM BECAUSE HE DID NOT COME TO CORINTH FOR A SECOND VISIT AS HE HAD PLANNED. THE CHANGING OF HIS PLANS BROUGHT CRITICISM OF VACILLATION AND FAULT-FINDING. ALSO, SOME SUGGESTED THAT PAUL'S DEALINGS WERE NOT ALWAYS WITH THEIR INTEREST IN MIND. OTHERS CHALLENGED HIS AUTHORITY, HIS MOTIVES, HIS EVERY WORD AND DEED. IN THESE VERSES, PAUL POINTS TO THE FACT THAT ALL HIS DEALINGS WITH THE CORINTHIANS HAD BEEN ABOVE BOARD AND WITH THEIR SPIRITUAL INTERESTS IN MIND. AS A MATTER OF FACT, IN VERSE 23 HE SAYS THAT ONE REASON WHY HE DIDN'T RETURN TO CORINTH WAS THAT HIS FIRST EPISTLE HAD BEEN SO SEVERE THAT HE DIDN'T WISH TO ADD ADDITIONAL PAIN TO THE CHURCH BY APPEARING IN PERSON. EVERY CHRISTIAN WORKER KNOWS THE STINGING HURT OF CRITICAL WORDS. "WHAT'S HE AFTER, WHAT'S HE UP TO, WHAT ARE THEY TRYING TO DO?" PAUL STATES CLEARLY THAT HE DID NOT SPEAK OUT OF BOTH SIDES OF HIS MOUTH THAT YES MEANT YES AND NO MEANT NO. - VERSES 19-20. PAUL REMINDED THE CORINTHIANS

THAT THAT WAS THE MATTER OF OUR BLESSED LORD. WHEN ONE STEPS INTO THE ARENA OF CHRISTIAN WORK, HE MUST EXPECT CRITICISM AND QUESTIONING OF MOTIVE. PAUL HAD NOTHING TO HIDE AND NO SUBTLE ULTERIOR MOTIVES IN WRITING THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH EXCEPT TO CORRECT THE MULTIPLE PROBLEMS THERE. PAUL DID NOT MAKE PROMISES WHICH HE BROKE EASILY OR LIGHTLY. HE WAS INDEED THE PERSONIFICATION OF DEPENDABILITY. PAUL LEARNED AT CORINTH THAT THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE WHO ALWAYS SEE WITH FAULT-FINDING EYES AND THAT THEIR VOICE IS ALWAYS CRITICAL AND CAUSTIC. PAUL HAD NO AX TO GRIND IN DEALING OR WRITING TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH. HIS ONLY INTEREST WAS TO HELP THE CHURCH. QUESTION: HOW DO WE RESPOND TO THIS KIND OF TREATMENT - THE UN-TEMPERED, UNKIND, UNTRUE CRITICISM? WILLIAM BARCLAY SUGGESTS THAT ONE OF THE BEST TESTS OF ANY PERSON IS HOW HE OR SHE ACCEPTS CRITICISM. (1) SOME RECEIVE IT WITH RESENTMENT. THIS AUTOMATICALLY DISQUALIFIES A PERSON FROM SUSTAINED LEADERSHIP. ALSO, THIS TYPE OF PERSON CAN NEVER COOPERATE IN A UNIFIED VENTURE. HE WILL NEVER IMPROVE OR LEARN IF HE REFUSES TO ADMIT HIS OWN WEAKNESS AND FAULTS. (2) HE MAY RECEIVE IT WITH PETULANCE. THERE ARE SOME FOLK WHO, WHEN CRITICIZED, SIMPLY QUIT. THEY SULK AND WON'T PLAY IF PEOPLE DON'T PET THEM AND LET THEM GO AND DO AS THEY WELL PLEASE. (3) THOSE WHO RECEIVE IT WITH UNDUE SENSITIVENESS. THERE ARE SOME FOLK WHO ARE SO THIN-SKINNED THAT THEY ARE EASILY HURT, DISCOURAGED, AND DEPRESSED IF CRITICIZED AT ALL. (4) THOSE WHO RECEIVE IT WITH HUMILITY. THE FACT THAT SOME PEOPLE CRITICIZE IN ORDER TO HURT OTHERS OR DO SO FROM A SENSE OF SUPERIORITY DOES NOT TAKE AWAY THE FACT THAT CRITICISM MAY BE ACCEPTED WITH A CHRISTIAN HUMILITY. LOOK AT THE TEXT IN VERSE 20-21 AND 23, WHERE PAUL TALKS ABOUT THE GLORY OF GOD, THE ANNOINTING OF GOD, GOD AS ONE'S RECORD. IF ONE IS SERVING CHRIST, AND IS DOING SO FOR THE GLORY OF GOD, HE WILL BE ABLE TO ACCEPT CRITICISM IN THE PROPER WAY. THE STORY IS TOLD CONCERNING A.J. GOSSIP, WHO WAS A MINISTER A FEW GENERATIONS AGO IN GLASGOW,

SCOTLAND. ON A PARTICULAR WEEK, WHEN THE PRESSURES OF CHRISTIAN MINISTRY HAD MADE IT DIFFICULT TO PREPARE FOR THE SUNDAY MORNING MESSAGE, GOSSIP SAID AS HE WALKED UP THE STAIRS TO THE PULPIT (EXPLAIN): "JESUS MET HIM THERE. HE LOOKED AT THE SERMON IN GOSSIP'S HANDS AND SAID, "WHAT HAVE YOU THERE?" "THIS WEEK'S SERMON." "IS THIS THE BEST YOU COULD DO FOR ME THIS WEEK?" GOSSIP SAID, AS HE THOUGHT BACK OVER THE PRESS OF THE WEEK, HE SAID, "I COULD HONESTLY SAY TO THE LORD: "YES, LORD, IT IS MY BEST."" THE PASTOR SAID, JESUS CHRIST TOOK THAT POOR MISERABLE SERMON AND TURNED IT INTO BLESSING FOR THE HEARTS OF THE SAINTS. THE APOSTLE PAUL FACED LIFE THAT WAY; HIS CONCERN WAS TO PLEASE CHRIST ABOVE ALL, ABOVE ALL OTHERS. IF WE PLEASE HIM, WE WILL PLEASE THOSE WHO ARE HIS SHEEP. NO ONE ELSE REALLY COUNTS IN THE ETERNAL EQUATION.

ROBERT K. SPRADLING JANUARY 10, 1982
A.M.

THE CORINTHIAN CORRECTION IN CONTEMPORARY COLLOQUIALISM

II CORINTHIANS 2:1-17

WHEN WE READ THE CORINTHIAN LETTER IN THE KING JAMES VERSION, SOMETIMES WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF THE TEXT. TODAY, WE WILL LOOK AT THESE VERSES AND ATTEMPT TO PARAPHRASE OR PUT INTO COLLOQUIAL EXPRESSION WHAT PAUL WAS SAYING TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH. WE WILL LIMIT THESE EXPRESSIONS TO FOUR.

(COLLOQUIALISM HAS TO DO WITH SPEECH THAT IS INFORMAL IN NATURE. THAT IS, SPEECH NOT NECESSARILY INTEMPERATE OR INCORRECT; BUT INFORMAL, NOT USUALLY SUITED FOR FORMAL WRITING OR SPEECH. IT IS THE WAY WE TALK TO ONE ANOTHER.)

I. "THIS HURTS ME MORE THAN IT DOES YOU" -- VERSES 1-4

PARENTS USE THIS EXPRESSION AND IT IS NEVER UNDERSTOOD BY A CHILD UNTIL HE BECOMES A PARENT. PAUL LOVED THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH. THE CHURCH HAD GONE FROM ONE PROBLEM TO ANOTHER, FROM ONE CRISIS TO ANOTHER. THERE WERE PROBLEMS SUCH AS DIVISIONS, DISCIPLINE, DIVORCE, DOCTRINE -- YOU NAME IT, THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH HAD IT. THERE WERE FRIENDS IN CORINTH NAMED PRISCILLA AND AQUILA, JUSTUS, CRISPUS, SOSTHENES AND THE HOUSEHOLD OF STEPHANAS, TO MENTION BUT A FEW OF THOSE OF WHOM THE SCRIPTURE SAYS: "AND MANY OF THE CORINTHIANS HEARING BELIEVED AND WERE BAPTIZED." (ACTS 18:8) PAUL DID NOT STAY A YEAR AND A HALF ANYWHERE WITHOUT DOING A SIGNIFICANT WORK FOR THE GLORY OF JESUS CHRIST.

THEREFORE, TO WRITE A LETTER OF A DISCIPLINARY NATURE WAS DIFFICULT AND TRAUMATIC FOR PAUL. "LETTERS THAT CORRECT IN THE RIGHT WAY ALWAYS REQUIRE COURAGE. THE DIFFICULTY OF WRITING CRITICAL LETTERS IS ILLUSTRATED IN THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN. THE UNION ARMY SEEMED TO BE COMMANDED BY BLUNDERING GENERALS. THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG WAS FOUGHT DURING THE FIRST THREE DAYS OF JULY IN 1863. LEE RETREATED WITH HIS DEFEATED ARMY TO THE POTOMAC RIVER. WHEN HE ARRIVED THERE, BECAUSE OF HEAVY RAINS, HE FOUND THE RIVER IMPASSIBLE AND WITH THE UNION ARMY BEHIND HIM HE WAS IN A TRAP FROM WHICH HE COULD NOT ESCAPE. LINCOLN KNEW THAT AND SAW THE OPPORTUNITY TO END THE WAR IMMEDIATELY. LINCOLN ORDERED GENERAL MEADE TO ATTACK IMMEDIATELY. THE ORDERS WERE TELEGRAPHED AND THEN SENT BY SPECIAL MESSENGER IN ORDER TO FACILITATE THE MANEUVER. HOWEVER, MEADE CALLED A COUNCIL OF WAR IN DIRECT VIOLATION OF THE PRESIDENT'S ORDERS, HE HESITATED, MADE EXCUSES, AND REFUSED TO ATTACK LEE. LINCOLN WAS FURIOUS AND IN BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT HE WROTE A SCORCHING LETTER TO MEADE, BUT MEADE NEVER SAW THE LETTER BECAUSE LINCOLN NEVER MAILED IT. APPARENTLY, THE PRESIDENT REFLECTED ON MEADE'S REASONS FOR NOT ATTACKING BECAUSE HE, LINCOLN, WAS NOT THERE AND SIMPLY DECIDED NOT TO SEND A LETTER OF THAT WEIGHT AND MAGNITUDE. IN THE BOOK ENTITLED "SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP," SANDERS TELLS HOW AN EARLY DIRECTOR OF THE CHINA INLAND MISSION, A SENSITIVE AND AFFECTIONATE MAN, HAD DIFFICULTY IN REPRIMANDING HIS FELLOW WORKERS. THE ESTRANGEMENT OF A FRIEND AND FELLOW WORKER IS ALWAYS A DIFFICULT THING TO FACE. AND, ALTHOUGH THIS CHRISTIAN LEADER DID NOT AVOID THE UNPLEASANT TASK WHEN NECESSARY, IT IS SAID THAT HE SPENT MUCH MORE TIME IN PRAYER BEFOREHAND. WHEN A MATTER OF DISCIPLINE

WAS AT STAKE HE WOULD WRITE A LETTER AND KEEP IT FOR SEVERAL DAYS, SOMETIMES RE-READING IT MANY TIMES, THEN EITHER DESTROYING IT OR SENDING IT.)

FOR PEOPLE WHO MUST WRITE SUCH LETTERS, IT IS EASY TO UNDERSTAND THE HEAVY BURDEN AND SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY ON PAUL'S HEART AND SHOULDERS AS HE WROTE THIS SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH. THERE IS NO COLD LEGALISTIC APPROACH IN THIS LETTER. IT SPEAKS OF LOVE, CONCERN, AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY. AS A MATTER OF FACT, PAUL SOUGHT TO AVOID HURTING THE CORINTHIANS TO THE EXTENT THAT HE POSTPONED HIS TRIP THERE BECAUSE HE KNEW HIS PRESENCE WOULD BE PAINFUL FOR THEM. THERE IS NO PONTIFICAL APPROACH, PAUL WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THE FEELINGS OF THE CHURCH AT CORINTH AND HE GOT NO PLEASURE OUT OF CAUSING THEM PAIN. THESE VERSES REVEAL A LOVING CONCERN AND CARE OF GOD'S UNDERSHEPHERD FOR THE PROBLEM SHEEP. THE WORDS HEAVINESS -- VERSE 1, SORROW AND SORRY -- VERSE 2, 3,7 AND GRIEVED -- VERSE 4, 5 ALL REVEAL THAT PAUL WAS SAD TO THE POINT OF TEARS FOR HAVING TO WRITE SUCH A STRONG LETTER. TRUE LOVE DISCIPLINES. "WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES." (HEBREWS 12:6) THE DESIRE FOR ACCEPTANCE AND POPULARITY WILL SOMETIMES KEEP PEOPLE FROM ACTING WHERE DISCIPLINE IS REQUIRED. FOR EXAMPLE, IF ONE GIVES A CHILD CANDY, CAKE, ICE CREAM AND TOYS AND NEVER INSISTS UPON MILK, VEGETABLES AND FRUIT IN THE DIET, SUCH PROCEDURE MIGHT BE POPULAR WITH THE CHILD BUT IT WOULD RUIN HIS HEALTH. PAUL WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THE SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE SAINTS AT CORINTH AND DISCIPLINE WAS A NECESSARY PART AND HE WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN THAT DISCIPLINE. (BY THE WAY, AN ARTICLE IN THE NEWSPAPER THIS WEEK BORE THE FOLLOWING CAPTION: "LACK OF DISCIPLINE MAY CAUSE EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS IN CHILDREN" THE ARTICLE

SAID SIMPLY THAT PARENTS WHO DO NOT KNOW HOW TO DISCIPLINE THEIR CHILDREN MAY BE BREEDING PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR CHILDREN STARTING IN INFANCY AND CONTINUING THROUGH LIFE. "DISCIPLINE IS A KEY FACTOR IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS." PHRASES SUCH AS "DISCIPLINE IS VITAL," OR "PARENTS WHO GIVE THEIR YOUNGSTERS EVERYTHING THEY WANT ARE ASKING FOR TROUBLE." THE PENDULUM HAS SWUNG TO THE OTHER END OF THE SPECTRUM. AFTER WRECKING A GENERATION OF KIDS, NOW THE EDUCATIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL OPINION IS TO FOLLOW THE BIBLICAL INJUNCTION TO DISCIPLINE THE CHILD.)

II. DON'T KICK A MAN WHEN HE IS DOWN -- VERSES 5-11

THE FIRST FOUR VERSES SPOKE OF THE PRINCIPLE OF DISCIPLINE AND NOW PAUL SPEAKS OF THE PRACTICE OF DISCIPLINE. THE SPECIFIC PROBLEM TO WHICH PAUL REFERS IS MENTIONED IN I CORINTHIANS 5:1-11. AT FIRST, THE CHURCH IGNORED THIS SITUATION OF GROSS IMMORALITY. WHEN CALLED UPON BY PAUL TO DEAL WITH THE SITUATION, THEY WENT TO THE OTHER EXTREME IN THAT THEY MAY HAVE BEEN TOO SEVERE WITH A MAN. THE PURPOSE OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE IS NOT TO DRIVE PEOPLE OUT OF THE CHURCH, BUT RATHER, TO BRING THEM TO THE PLACE OF REPENTANCE AND FRUITFUL AND SPIRITUAL LIVING. THIS MAN'S PUBLIC SIN REQUIRED PUBLIC REBUKE. HE WAS TREATED AS AN OUTCAST, AS AN UNBELIEVER. THE ENTIRE SUBJECT OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE IS A DIFFICULT ONE. DISCIPLINE IS NOT PRACTICED BECAUSE IT IS DIFFICULT AND MOST BELIEVERS, PASTORS, AND CHURCH BOARDS DON'T WANT TO BE PUT ON THE SPOT TO MAKE THESE KINDS OF DECISIONS. ALSO,

LEGALISTS WHO EXERCISE DISCIPLINE ABOUT EXTERNALS AND AVOID THE GREATER AND MORE WEIGHTY SUBJECTS OF SCRIPTURE HAVE MADE THE WHOLE SUBJECT VERY UNPALATABLE. HOWEVER, A CHURCH IS A FAMILY AND PEOPLE WHO ARE MEMBERS OF THAT FAMILY MUST UNDERSTAND THAT IT IMPLIES RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY. AS MEMBERS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH, WE ARE RESPONSIBLE AND ACCOUNTABLE NOT ONLY TO GOD BUT TO ONE ANOTHER. IN THE HISTORY OF THIS CHURCH, THERE HAVE BEEN ONLY A VERY FEW MATTERS OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE, MOST INVOLVING IMMORALITY. HOWEVER, THERE IS A LIMITED SENSE IN WHICH DISCIPLINE IS PRACTICED BY THE BOARD IN REVIEWING MEMBERSHIP. ONE CANNOT REMAIN A MEMBER OF THIS CHURCH AND BE DELINQUENT IN ATTENDANCE AND OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES. THE TEXT SUGGESTS THAT THE SINNING BROTHER WHEN EXCOMMUNICATED TO THE WORLD REPENTED AND DESIRED TO BE REINSTATED IN THE CHURCH. THE DANGER OF AN UNLOVING, SEVERE, CRITICAL ATTITUDE IS VERY REAL IN MATTERS OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE. SOMEONE HAS SUGGESTED THAT THE CHURCH IS THE ONLY ARMY WHICH FAILS TO DEAL WITH ITS CASUALTIES IN A RESPONSIBLE WAY. AS A MATTER OF FACT, SINNING SAINTS ARE VERY MUCH LIKE SICK CHICKENS! (RELATE CONCERNING PECKING TO DEATH IN A HENHOUSE--RELATE TO GRANDMOTHER'S EXPERIENCE GATHERING EGGS -- DEAD CHICKEN -- PECKED TO DEATH . IT WAS A WAY OF DEALING WITH THE WEAK.) TO BE SURE, THE BEST OF THE LORD'S PEOPLE ARE WEAK AND FRAIL, MAKE MISTAKES. NO ONE should WANTS TO BE LEGALISTIC, JUDGMENTAL, UNKIND AND UNCHRISTIAN. THE RECOVERY OF THE SINNING BROTHER SHOULD BE OF UTMOST AND UPPERMOST CONCERN. (GAL. 6:1). PAUL'S CONCLUSION TO DISCIPLINE SITUATIONS IS THAT THE CHURCH SHOULD BE AWARE OF SATAN'S BAG OF TRICKS.

HE WILL USE EVERY DEVICE IMAGINABLE TO DISCOURAGE CHRISTIANS AND TO DESTROY A LOCAL CHURCH. THE SITUATION WHICH EXISTED AT CORINTH IS NOT VERY LIKELY IN THE AVERAGE LOCAL CHURCH BECAUSE IF A MEMBER OF ONE CHURCH IS DISCIPLINED, OR LEAVES A CHURCH, HE WILL SIMPLY GO ACROSS TOWN AND FIND ANOTHER CHURCH WHERE HE WILL BE RECEIVED WITH OPEN ARMS -- ESPECIALLY IF HE IS A GOOD GIVER!

III. "WE'RE ON THE WINNING SIDE, WE'RE #1"-- VERSES 12-14

EVERYBODY WANTS TO BE IDENTIFIED WITH A WINNER. IN POLITICS OR SPORTS THE RAISED FINGER INDICATING VICTORY AND SUPREMACY IS SEEN AT ALMOST EVERY PUBLIC GATHERING. THERE ARE TIMES, WHEN THE SAINTS IMPLY THAT SATAN IS INVINCIBLE. SOMETIMES WE GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT SATAN IS SO POWERFUL AND OVERWHELMING THAT EVIL IS ON THE RAMPAGE AND THERE IS NO WAY TO STOP IT. VERSE 14 LITERALLY TALKS ABOUT OUR MARCHING IN CHRIST'S TRIUMPH OR PARADE. EVERY ROMAN CITIZEN KNEW ABOUT THE TRIUMPH. IT WAS A MAGNIFICENT PARADE IN HONOR OF A VICTORIOUS ROMAN GENERAL. IT WAS GRANTED BY THE SENATE FOR ONE WHO HAD DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF IN DECISIVE VICTORY. IN ORDER TO QUALIFY, AT LEAST 5,000 OF THE ENEMY MUST HAVE FALLEN IN ONE ENGAGEMENT AND THE ANNEXATION OF TERRITORY WAS USUALLY INVOLVED. THE GENERAL WOULD ENTER A CITY IN A CHARIOT DRAWN BY NO LESS THAN FOUR HORSES, A CROWN OF LAUREL LEAVES ON HIS HEAD, AND A SCEPTER IN HIS HAND. HE WAS PRECEDED BY SENATE OFFICIALS, MUSICIANS, THE SPOILS OF VICTORY, HIS VICTORIOUS ARMY AND THE CAPTIVES BOUND IN FETTERS. THE GENERAL WAS USUALLY CLAD IN A PURPLE TUNIC EMBROIDERED WITH GOLDEN PALM LEAVES AND OVER IT A PURPLE TOGA MARKED WITH GOLDEN STARS. AFTER HIM RODE HIS FAMILY OR

SOMETIMES HIS CHILDREN RODE WITH HIM IN THE CHARIOT AND AS HE MADE HIS WAY ALONG THE ROUTE OF THE TRIUMPH, THE CROWDS WOULD CHEER AND HERALD HIM AS THE VICTORIOUS SOLDIER. IT WAS AN UNFORGETTABLE DAY IN THE LIFE OF A ROMAN GENERAL AND COULD HAPPEN BUT ONCE IN A LIFETIME. YOU AND I ARE MARCHING IN CHRIST'S UNSTOPPABLE, UNCONQUERABLE ARMY ON PARADE. WE ARE ON THE VICTORY SIDE -- NOTHING CAN AND WILL STOP HIM. IF YOU WANT TO SEE THE FINAL CHAPTER OF HIS CONQUERING POWER READ REVELATION 19. PAUL SAID THE THE CORINTHIANS WHAT STARTED OUT AS TROUBLE WILL END AS TRIUMPH. (I CORINTHIANS 15:57)

IV. "WHAT KIND OF PERFUME ARE YOU WEARING?" -- VERSES 15-16

THE IMAGERY OF THE TRIUMPH WAS STILL IN PAUL'S MIND. IN THAT MAGNIFICENT PARADE THERE WERE PRIESTS WHO WALKED ALONG SWINGING INCENSE-FILLED CENSERS. THE CENSERS FILLED THE AIR WITH A FRAGRANT AROMA. TO THE VARIOUS PEOPLE IN THE PARADE THE ODOR OR AROMA MEANT SOMETHING. TO THE VICTORIOUS GENERAL, THAT ODOR WAS A SWEET SMELL OF VICTORY. IT WAS A SAVOUR OF LIFE AND ALL THE GOOD THINGS AWAITING IN THE PUBLIC ARENA. TO THE SLAVES AND CAPTIVES IN THE SAME PARADE THAT SAME AROMA OR ODOR HAD AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT EFFECT. TO THEM, THE SMELL OF THE INCENSE WAS A WAS A SMELL OF DOOM, BECAUSE SHORTLY THEY WOULD BE EXECUTED OR USED IN PUBLIC SPORTS GAMES BUT NOT PERMITTED TO LIVE. SOMEONE HAS SUGGESTED THAT JUST AS A BEE PROVIDES HONEY AND SWEETNESS TO SOME, IT MAY PROVIDE A STING TO OTHERS.

JOSEPH WAS A SAVOR OF DEATH TO THE BAKER, BUT A SAVOR OF LIFE TO THE BUTLER. TO ONE THIEF ON THE CROSS, JESUS WAS A SAVOR OF LIFE BUT TO THE UNREPENTANT THIEF, JESUS BROUGHT THE MESSAGE OF DESTRUCTION AND DOOM. FOR SOME, JESUS IS A SWEET SMELLING SAVOR OF JOY, LIFE AND BLESSING. HE IS THAT TO THOSE WHO RECEIVE HIM. TO THOSE WHO REFUSE THEM, HE IS A FEARSOME PERSON WHOSE MESSAGE BRINGS GUILT AND CONDEMNATION. THERE IS ALSO ANOTHER SENSE IN WHICH THE BELIEVER'S LIFE IS A SWEET-SMELLING FRAGRANCE OF CHRIST AND WHEREVER THE BELIEVER GOES THAT FRAGRANCE GOES WITH HIM. THAT IS WHY SOME FOLK RESENT THE PRESENCE OF CHRISTIANS IN PLACES WHERE SIN ABOUNDS. WHEN THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST IS PREACHED FROM A PULPIT, IT IS AN ODOR OF LIFE TO SOME AND DEATH TO OTHERS. <u>RECEIVING</u> OR <u>REJECTING</u> CHRIST IS THE DETERMINING FACTOR.

ROBERT K. SPRADLING JANUARY 24, 1982
A.M.

"THE MAN WHO WORE A VEIL"

II CORINTHIANS 3:1-18

IN THIS CHAPTER, PAUL SPEAKS OF THE GLORY OF THE MINISTRY. THREE WORDS OR REFERENCES TO THREE OBJECTS WILL SERVE TO DIVIDE THE CHAPTER.
(1) EPISTLE - v. 3
(2) VEIL - v. 13
(3) GLASS OR MIRROR - v. 18

MEN DON'T WEAR VEILS! YET, IN THIS CHAPTER, ONE MAN DID AND, AS A MATTER OF FACT, ALL MEN DO! WE WILL CONSIDER THIS MATTER IN THE SECOND DIVISION OF THE CHAPTER.

I. A WRITTEN EPISTLE OR LETTER TO THOSE WHO WERE CALLED WALKING EPISTLES - v. 1-3

AFTER PAUL DEPARTED FROM CORINTH, CERTAIN TEACHERS OR RELIGIOUS PEDDLERS CAME INTO TOWN ARMED WITH LETTERS OF REFERENCE TO COMMEND THEMSELVES TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH. THEY SET OUT TO DISCREDIT PAUL, SUGGESTING THAT WHEN HE CAME TO CORINTH HE HAD NO LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATIO REFERENCES, CREDITS OR TESTIMONIALS FROM THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM OR ANY OTHER CHURCH FOR THAT MATTER. THE CORINTHIANS, LIKE MOST PEOPLE, WERE IMPRESSED WITH WRITTEN DOCUMENTS OF ENDORSEMENT. AND, ONE MIGHT UNDERSTAND THE NECESSITY FOR SUCH A PROCEDURE CONCERNING A TOTAL STRANGER OR A MAN WHOSE BACKGROUND AND MINISTRY IS UNKNOWN TO A CHURCH. HOWEVER, WHAT THESE BRETHREN DID NOT UNDERSTAND WAS THAT SOMETIMES REFERENCES ARE MEANINGLESS BECAUSE IT IS NOT TERRIBLY DIFFICULT TO SECURE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION. IN THOSE DAYS, AS NOW, TO ATTEND THE RIGHT SCHOOLS, MAKE THE RIGHT GRADES AND KNOW THE RIGHT PEOPLE IN NO WAY GUARANTEES AN

EFFECTIVE MINISTRY. PAUL WROTE TO THE CHURCH IN REPLY TO THEIR CONCERN THAT HE HAD SOMETHING FAR BETTER THAN FORMAL CREDENTIALS, NAMELY, THE DRASTIC CHANGE IN THE LIVES OF PEOPLE WHO WERE SAVED UNDER HIS MINISTRY. PAUL SAID, YOU ARE A WALKING TESTIMONIAL TO MY CREDITS! PAUL'S MESSAGE AND MINISTRY WAS NOT WRITTEN DOWN ON A PIECE OF STONE OR PAPER BUT IN HUMAN HEARTS AND LIVES. COMPARE HIS STATEMENT IN I COR. 6:11ff CHANGED LIVES WERE THE BEST POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATIO CONCERNING THE QUALITY OF PAUL'S MINISTRY.

(THERE USED TO BE AN OLD SAYING FOR YOUNG PREACHERS - "IF YOU CANDIDATE IN A CITY CHURCH TAKE YOUR BEST SUIT; IF YOU CANDIDATE IN A COUNTRY CHURCH TAKE YOUR BEST SERMON.")

(SPEAKING OF LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION, SOMEONE CALLED MY ATTENTION TO A LETTER WHICH MIGHT HAVE BEEN WRITTEN TO A CHURCH PULPIT OR SEARCH COMMITTEE FOR A PULPIT IN A MODERN CHURCH.)

ONE GENUINE BELIEVER AT CORINTH WAS WORTH MORE THAN A THOUSAND REFERENCES. A PROPER OR GOOD LETTER SHOULD HAVE SEVERAL CHARACTERISTICS OR FEATURES. (1) LEGIBILITY (2) PROPER FORM (3) GOOD MATERIAL, SUCH AS PAPER AND WRITING INSTRUMENT (4) STYLE OF THE WRITER-PERSONALITY COMING THROUGH (5) CLARITY. (RELATE LETTERS WHICH SAY "DEAR OCCUPANT" AND ALSO A -COMPUTER LETTER FROM MY FRIEND BILL CLOUSE WHICH BEGAN "DEAR MR. SPRADLING." BOTH LETTERS I THREW IN FILE 13!) YOU AND I AS CHRISTIANS ARE LIVING LETTERS TO A DYING WORLD. AND AS THE POET HAS SAID, YOU ARE WRITING A GOSPEL, A CHAPTER EACH DAY, BY THE DEED THAT YOU DO AND THE WORD THAT YOU SAY. MEN READ WHAT YOU WRITE, WHETHER FAITHFUL OR TRUE. JUST WHAT IS THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO YOU?

"Dear Occupant Christians" not much substance!

II. A VEIL WORN BY MOSES AND BY ALL MEN-vs.6-16

THESE VERSES RELATE THE CONTRAST BETWEEN LAW AND GRACE. THE TERM "LETTER" REFERS TO THE OLD TESTAMENT LAW. IN THESE VERSES, PAUL SHOWS HOW THE OLD TEST. LAW WAS NEVER GIVEN FOR MAN TO KEEP IN ORDER TO BE SAVED. NO MAN HAS EVER BEEN SAVED THROUGH KEEPING THE LAW. THE CONTEXT OF

THE CHAPTER SPEAKS OF THE LAW AS "A MINISTRATION OF DEATH," IT CONDEMNED MAN IN HIS SINFUL ESTATE. THE LAW WAS GOOD AND IN FACT A GLORIOUS THING. WHEN MOSES CAME INTO THE PRESENCE OF GOD WHO GAVE THE LAW, THERE WAS GLORY ATTACHED TO IT. THE WEAKNESS WAS NOT IN THE LAW BUT IN MAN WHO COULD NOT KEEP IT. AS A MATTER OF FACT, THE LAW WAS NOT GIVEN FOR MAN TO KEEP, BUT RATHER IT ACTED AS A MIRROR OR SCHOOLMASTER TO REVEAL MAN'S FRAILTY APART FROM CHRIST AND TO BRING HIM TO CHRIST AS THE ONLY SOURCE AND PERSON OF SALVATION. MOSES, THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE LAW IN THE OLD TEST., SPOKE OF A SYSTEM BY WHICH MEN COULD DRAW NEAR TO GOD IF THEY DID CERTAIN THINGS BUT THE LAW HAD A FADING GLORY AND SPOKE OF A DISPENSATION THAT WOULD BE ABOLISHED. (CF. ROMANS 3:20, 6:14; GAL. 3:10-11) THE TEXT GOES ON TO SAY THAT NOT ONLY DID MOSES COVER HIMSELF WITH A VEIL WHEN HE CAME INTO THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND THE LAW, BUT THERE IS A SENSE IN WHICH EVERY MAN'S HEART IS VEILED CONCERNING THE THINGS OF GOD UNTIL HE COMES TO KNOW CHRIST. CF. VS. 14-16. THE SAME GENERAL TRUTH IS MENTIONED IN II COR. 3-4. ACCORDING TO THESE VERSES, MEN ARE SPIRITUALLY BLIND UNTIL THAT INVISIBLE VEIL IS LIFTED FROM THE HEART AND MIND BY CHRIST THROUGH REGENERATION. ONLY CHRIST CAN LIFT THAT VEIL OF SPIRITUAL IGNORANCE AND INDIFFERENCE FROM THE HEART. NO ONE ELSE HAS THE POWER TO DO SO. THERE IS NO GREATER PERSONAL NEED IN YOUR LIFE THAN TO HAVE THAT VEIL OF BLINDNESS LIFTED FROM YOUR HEART BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD. EVEN THOUGH THE CONTEXT OF V. 16 REFERS TO JEWS, THE PRINCIPLE IS TRUE OF EITHER JEW OR GENTILE THAT BY TURNING TO THE LORD IN FAITH THE VEIL OF OBSCURITY SEPARATING MAN FROM GOD IS LIFTED. (AS A MATTER OF FACT, THE WORD VEIL OR KALUMMA IN II COR. 3:13-16 IS ONLY USED HERE IN THE NEW TEST. AND IS SIMILAR TO THE WORD KALUPTO, WHICH MEANS TO COVER OR HIDE.) THE CONTEXT OF THE MOSES EXPERIENCE MAY BE SEEN IN EXO. 34:33. THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE BIBLE ITSELF WILL ALWAYS BE A LOCKED BOOK TO THE HEART THAT DOES NOT KNOW CHRIST. JUST AS OUR LORD RENT THE VAIL IN THE TEMPLE TO SHOW THAT CHRIST

IS THE FULFILLMENT OF THE OLD TEST. LAW AND GOD DOES NOT INTEND FOR US TO ATTEMPT TO KEEP THAT LAW IN ORDER TO BE SAVED. (RELATE RECENT CONVERSATION WITH A FRIEND ABOUT HOW PEOPLE MAKE FOOLISH STATEMENTS ABOUT THE LAW BY IMPLYING THAT THEY ARE KEEPING THE GOLDEN RULE OR THE 10 COMMANDMENTS TO THE BEST OF THEIR ABILITY - THIS IS SIMPLY NOT TRUE! NO MAN DOES HIS BEST OR WHAT HE KNOWS IS BEST ALL THE TIME. TO IMPLY THAT ONE IS ATTEMPTING TO KEEP THE LAW AS A BASIS FOR SALVATION IS A REVELATION OF TOTAL SPIRITUAL IGNORANCE AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE BIBLE. GOD DOESN'T WANT YOU AND ME TO TRY TO KEEP THE 10 COMMANDMENTS IN ORDER TO GET TO HEAVEN! HE WANTS MEN TO TURN TO CHRIST AS THE ONE WHO KEPT THEM FOR US.

III. A MIRROR, A REFLECTION, A GAZE AND AN IMAGE
vs. 13

Principle

THERE IS A LAW OF LIFE THAT YOU AND I TEND TO LOOK LIKE WHAT WE LOOK AT. THE BIBLE HAS A GREAT DEAL TO SAY ABOUT THIS PRINCIPLE. THE WORD LOOK IS SOMETIMES USED IN THE BIBLE AS A SYNONYM FOR BELIEVE. (NUMB. 21:4-9, JOHN 3:14-15 ISAIAH 45:22) THESE VERSES ALL SPEAK OF THE LOOK OF SALVATION. WHEN ONE LOOKS TO JESUS CHRIST IN SAVING FAITH, HE IS SAVED FROM HIS SINS JUST AS THE PEOPLE IN NUMBERS WERE CURED OF THE SERPENT BITE BY A SIMPLE LOOK. AFTER THE LOOK OF SALVATION, THE BIBLE SPEAKS OF THE GAZE OF SANCTIFICATION. PEOPLE WHO GAZE AT FILMSTARS, RECORD MAKERS, AND TV PERSONALITIES, AND WHO DO SO WITH REGULARITY WILL SOON BEGIN TO DRESS LIKE THEM, ADOPT THEIR MANNERISMS, AND FOLLOW THE KIND OF HERO WORSHIP. IT IS GENERALLY BELIEVED THAT IF TWO PEOPLE LIVE TOGETHER LONG ENOUGH THEY WILL BEGIN TO LOOK ALIKE. IT IS ALSO A FACT OF LIFE THAT CHILDREN TEND TO BEAR THE PHYSICAL IMAGE OF THEIR PARENTS. IN THE OLD TEST. GOD'S GLORY WAS SEEN IN THE TABERNACLE AND TEMPLE, BUT TODAY GOD'S GLORY DOES NOT RESIDE IN A BUILDING OR IN RELIGIOUS OBJECTS, BUT IN A PEOPLE. THIS VERSE IS SAYING SIMPLY THAT IF YOU AND I LOOK INTO THE PAGES OF SACRED SCRIPTURE OFTEN ENOUGH AND LONG ENOUGH, THERE WILL BE

FROM THAT EXPERIENCE AN IMAGE OF CHRIST IN OUR LIVES AND PEOPLE WILL SEE HIM REFLECTED IN US. THE ONLY WAY FOR YOU AND ME TO BE TRANSFORMED AND NOT CONFORMED CONCERNING THIS WORLD IS TO LOOK AT CHRIST. WHEN WE DO, A TRANSFIGURATION OR METAMORPHOSIS OF CHRISTIAN GROWTH WILL DEVELOP. FEW STORIES ILLUSTRATE THIS PRINCIPLE BETTER THAN HAWTHORNE'S STORY OF THE GREAT STONE FACE. HE TELLS THE STORY OF A BOY WHO LIVED IN A VILLAGE BELOW A MOUNTAIN AND CARVED IN THE FACE OF THE MOUNTAIN BY THE FORCES OF NATURE WAS A GREAT STONE FACE LOOKING DOWN SOLEMNLY OVER THE PEOPLE OF THE VILLAGE. ACCORDING TO LEGEND, SOME DAY A MAN WOULD COME TO THAT VILLAGE WHO WOULD LOOK JUST LIKE THE GREAT STONE FACE AND HE WOULD DO REMARKABLE THINGS FOR THE VILLAGE, BRINGING BUSINESS, EMPLOYMENT AND GENERAL OVERALL BLESSINGS TO THE PEOPLE OF THE VILLAGE. THE STORY SO FASCINATED THE LAD THAT HE USED TO SPEND HOURS JUST LOOKING AT THE GREAT STONE FACE AND THINKING ABOUT THE ANTICIPATED GLORY TO COME. YEARS PASSED BY AND NO "SAVIOUR" CAME AND STILL THE YOUNG MAN WHO HAD NOW BECOME AN OLD MAN SAT AND LOOKED AT THE BEAUTY AND MAJESTY OF THE GREAT STONE FACE. AS THE LEGEND GOES, ONE DAY A PERSON WALKING THROUGH TOWN SAW THE OLD MAN SITTING LOOKING AT THE FACE AND LOOKING AT THE SIDE OF THE MOUNTAIN EXCLAIMED, "HE HAS COME, THE ONE WHO IS LIKE THE GREAT STONE FACE!" THE WHOLE VILLAGE GATHERED TO LOOK AT THE OLD MAN, WHO INDEED LOOK LIKE THE FACE IN THE OLD MOUNTAIN. SIMPLY STATED, HE HAD BECOME LIKE THAT AT WHICH HE GAZED. IF YOU AND I DESIRE TO BE CHRIST-LIKE, WE MUST GAZE AT JESUS CHRIST. SOMEONE HAS SUGGESTED THAT THE SONG ENTITLED "TAKE TIME TO BE HOLY" SHOULD BE RETITLED "TAKE TIME TO BEHOLD HIM" THIS IDEA OF NO SUBSTITUTES AND NO SHORTCUTS IS FOREIGN TO SPIRITUAL INTERESTS TODAY. TO BASK IN THE PRESENCE OF A HOLY SAVIOUR IS NOT ONLY UNDESIRABLE TO MOST, BUT UNATTRACTIVE AND UNPRACTICED. "FLESH" IS THE ORIENTATION OF MANY RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES. (RELATE TO CORAL RIDGE CONCERT.) HOWEVER, IN SPITE OF ALL RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY AND INTERESTS AND EVEN IN THE WAKE OF RELIGIOUS TALK AND BIBLE DOCTRINE, THERE

IS ONE THING YOU AND I CANNOT FAKE, AND THAT IS THE REFLECTED IMAGE OF CHRIST IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER AS THE RESULT OF SPENDING TIME IN HIS PRESENCE. FOR MOST OF US, THAT IMAGE IS EITHER TOTALLY ABSENT OR VERY FAINT AND DIM. WE WOULD DO WELL TO TAKE HEED TO PAUL'S ADMONITION IN HEBREWS 12:2. THE WORLD WILL NEVER SEE CHRIST IN THIS LIFE UNLESS THEY SEE HIM IN CHRISTLIKE PEOPLE. IT MAY BE THAT SO FEW PEOPLE ARE ATTRACTED TO OUR CHURCHES BECAUSE THEY SEE SO LITTLE OF CHRIST HERE. TOZER HAS SAID IT WELL, "ONLY TO SIT AND THINK OF GOD, O WHAT A JOY IT IS! TO THINK THE THOUGHT, TO BREATHE THE NAME; EARTH HAS NO HIGHER BLISS. FATHER OF JESUS, LOVE'S REWARD! WHAT RAPTURE WILL IT BE, PROSTRATE BEFORE THY THRONE TO LIE, AND GAZE AND GAZE ON THEE!

WE NEED NOT TELL OUR FELLOW BELIEVERS THE OBJECT OF OUR GAZE - IT IS OBVIOUS PERHAPS TO ALL BUT US.

GENTLEMEN:

UNDERSTANDING THAT YOUR PULPIT IS VACANT, I SHOULD LIKE TO SUBMIT MY APPLICATION. I AM GENERALLY CONSIDERED TO BE A GOOD PREACHER. I HAVE BEEN A LEADER IN MOST OF THE PLACES I HAVE SERVED. I HAVE ALSO FOUND TIME TO DO SOME WRITING ON THE SIDE.

I AM OVER 50 YEARS OF AGE, AND WHILE MY HEALTH IS NOT THE BEST, I STILL MANAGE TO GET ENOUGH WORK DONE SO AS TO PLEASE MY PARISH.

AS FOR REFERENCES, I AM SOMEWHAT HANDICAPPED. I HAVE NEVER PREACHED IN ANY PLACE FOR MORE THAN 3 YEARS. AND THE CHURCHES I HAVE PREACHED IN HAVE GENERALLY BEEN PRETTY SMALL, EVEN THOUGH THEY WERE LOCATED IN RATHER LARGE CITIES. IN SOME PLACES I HAD TO LEAVE BECAUSE MY MINISTRY CAUSED RIOTS AND DISTURBANCES. EVEN WHERE I STAYED, I DID NOT GET ALONG TOO WELL WITH OTHER RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN TOWN, WHICH MAY INFLUENCE THE KIND OF REFERENCES THESE PLACES WILL SEND YOU. I HAVE ALSO BEEN THREATENED SEVERAL TIMES AND EVEN PHYSICALLY ATTACKED. THREE OR FOUR TIMES I HAVE GONE TO JAIL FOR WITNESSING TO MY CONVICTIONS.

STILL, I FEEL SURE I CAN BRING VITALITY TO YOUR CHURCH EVEN THOUGH I AM NOT PARTICULARLY GOOD AT KEEPING RECORDS. I HAVE TO ADMIT I DON'T EVEN REMEMBER ALL THOSE WHOM I'VE BAPTISED. HOWEVER, IF YOU CAN USE ME, I SHOULD BE PLEASED TO BE CONSIDERED.

PAUL

ROBERT K. SPRADLING JANUARY 31, 1982 A.M.

AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE GOSPEL MINISTRY

II CORINTHIAN 4:1-6

THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY 400,000 PROTESTANT CLERGYMEN IN AMERICA, 50,000 MISSIONARIES WORLDWIDE, AND LESS THAN 50,000 STUDYING FOR THE MINISTRY IN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARIES IN AMERICA. (WHEN I WAS IN SEMINARY 20 YEARS AGO, THEY WERE PREDICTING A SHORTAGE BUT THIS HAS NOT COME TRUE.) THE MINISTERS LIFE AND CASUALTY INSURANCE COMPANY DID A SURVEY SOME YEARS AGO AND DISCOVERED THAT MOST MINISTERS IN AMERICA DO NOT HAVE A REGULAR DAY OFF AND WORK ON THE AVERAGE OF OVER 60 HOURS PER WEEK. ACCORDING TO THE SURVEY, TOP EXECUTIVES IN 500 U. S. CORPORATIONS WORK ABOUT THE SAME LENGTH OF TIME, BUT EARN 20 TIMES MORE. ONE OUT OF EIGHT CLERGYMEN IS THINKING SERIOUSLY ABOUT RESIGNATION TO PURSUE OTHER TYPES OF WORK. THE REASON FOR SUCH THINKING IS BECAUSE OF THE APPARENT INEFFECTIVENESS OF WORK DONE IN CHURCH. THE DROP-OUT PROBLEM IS DUE TO THE CRISIS ATMOSPHERE OF TOO MANY PROBLEMS AND TOO FEW SOLUTIONS. INSECURITY FOR ONE'S POSITION, FAMILY, RETIREMENT AND OTHER FACTORS HAVE LED MANY TO LEAVE THE MINISTRY. WHY WOULD A PERSON SEEK SUCH A FINANCIALLY UNREWARDING CAREER? THE ANSWER MUST BE THAT NOT EVERYBODY MEASURES SUCCESS IN TERMS OF FINANCIAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS. HOWEVER, FROM THE BIBLICAL POINT OF VIEW, A MINISTER DOES NOT SEEK THE MINISTRY, IT SEEKS HIM. THAT IS PAUL'S FIRST SUGGESTION IN OUR CHAPTER TODAY -- "SEEING WE HAVE THIS MINISTRY"

I. THE CALL TO THE GOSPEL MINISTRY IS BASED ON MERCY, NOT MERIT -- VERSE 1

THE PHRASE LITERALLY READS "WE WERE MERCIED." TWO OF PAUL'S FAVORITE WORDS ARE GRACE AND MERCY. (SHOW THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE TWO TERMS) BY USING THE TERM MERCY, PAUL DISASSOCIATES HIMSELF AND HIS ASSOCIATES FROM ANY HIGH ECCLESIASTICAL STANDING OF PERSONAL WORTH CONCERNING THE MINISTRY. AS FAR AS PAUL WAS CONCERNED, GOD TOOK POOR, MISERABLE CREATURES AND PUT THEM INTO THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL MINISTRY. (I TIMOTHY 1:12-16) THE WORD MERCY SUGGESTS THE EXPRESSION OF GOD'S GOODNESS AND LOVE TOWARD THOSE WHO ARE WRETCHED AND GUILTY. IF THESE ARE THE TERMS PAUL USES TO DESCRIBE HIMSELF, WHO HAD FEW PEERS AS A RELIGIOUS LEADER, IT LEAVES NO OTHER MAN ROOM FOR BOASTING. THE TERM MERIT DOES NOT APPEAR IN SCRIPTURE, YET THE IDEA IS INHERENT IN EVERY UNSAVED MAN AND EVEN IN THE PAGES OF CHURCH HISTORY. MEN NO LESS THAN AUGUSTINE AND THOMAS AQUINES BOTH ENDORSED THE IDEA OF MERIT CONCERNING SALVATION! (C. E. HARRISON, PAGE 349) MANY PEOPLE IN CHURCH HISTORY BELIEVED THAT BAPTISM AND OTHER RITUAL ABSOLVED SIN AND PUT THE RECIPIENT INTO A MERITORIOUS POSITION BEFORE GOD. IN CERTAIN SYSTEMS OF THEOLOGY, THERE IS A STRANGE PROGRESS TO THE IDEA OF MERIT. FOR SOME BELIEVE THAT THE NATURE OF MAN HAS SUFFICIENT GOODNESS, OR VIRTUE, TO MOVE HIM TOWARD GOOD AND, THEREFORE, TOWARD GOD THUS HE MOVES UP ANOTHER PEG IN THE STAGE OR ROUND OF SPIRITUAL GRACE WHICH ULTIMATELY LEADS ONE TO ETERNAL LIFE. I WAS STARTLED TO READ CONCERNING A DOCTRINE CALLED THE TREASURY OF MERIT, FOUND IN SOME THEOLOGY WHICH SUGGESTS THAT CHRIST'S SUFFERING WAS MORE THAN ENOUGH FOR THE HUMAN RACE AND THE SACRIFICIAL WORKS OF SOME SAINTS

WAS MORE THAN NEEDED FOR THEIR OWN PERSONAL WELLBEING, THEREFORE, THEIR GOOD WORKS LEFT A RESIDUE OR SURPLUS FOR THE REST OF US! (THOMAS AQUINES ENDORSED THIS IDEA!) TO BE SURE, THERE IS A KIND OF MERIT SYSTEM IN OUR WORLD WHICH TEACHES THAT THOSE WHO HAVE ABILITY AND WORK HARD MAY ACHIEVE WORTHY GOALS AND DESERVE RECOGNITION AND REWARD FOR SUCH ACCOMPLISHMENT. OUR WORLD FUNCTIONS UNDER SUCH A SYSTEM. WHEN IT COMES TO SALVATION AND FORGIVENESS OF SINS, NO MAN HAS THE ABILITY, NO MATTER HOW GOOD OR HOW HARD HE TRIES, TO GAIN MERIT IN THE EYES OF GOD. THE TERM GRACE BY DEFINITION SUGGESTS ONE WHO IS ABSOLUTELY UNDESERVING AND UNWORTHY OF SALVATION! (TITUS 3:5, EPHESIANS 2:8-9) THE PROBLEM ARISES WHEN PEOPLE ATTEMPT TO ADD TO OR SECOND GUESS GOD. IF ST. PAUL CONSIDERED HIMSELF "CHIEFEST OF SINNERS AND LESS THAN THE LEAST OF ALL SAINTS" HOW DARE ANY OF US SUGGEST ANYTHING TO THE CONTRARY REGARDING EITHER PERSONAL SALVATION OR A CALL TO THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY?

II. THE CONTINUATION IN THE GOSPEL MINISTRY IS DEPENDENT UPON THE COURAGE NOT TO QUIT - VERSE 1

THE PHRASE "WE FAINT NOT" LITERALLY MEANS WE DO NOT GIVE UP AND QUIT, GIVE IN TO EVIL, LOOSE COURAGE, OR BECOME DISCOURAGED, BEHAVE BADLY. A. T. ROBERTSON HAS WELL SAID: "OFTEN THE DEAD PULL OF THINGS IS HARD TO OVERCOME. IT IS EASY JUST TO GIVE UP AND QUIT. JUST TO STICK TO ONE'S TASK AND TO GO ON IS THE HARD THING, WHEN THE FIRST FLUSH OF ROMANCE IS OVER." WHEN PAUL THOUGHT OF THE DIFFICULTIES THROUGH WHICH HE HAD PASSED, IT WAS THE "CARE OF ALL THE CHURCHES" THAT CROWNED HIS SUMMATION IN II CORINTHIANS 11:28.

PAUL HAD DIFFICULT MOMENTS IN THE MINISTRY. IT WAS NOT EASY TO SEE PEOPLE REJECT BOTH THE MESSENGER AND THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL. IT IS NOT EASY TO STAND ON PRINCIPLE, ESPECIALLY IF ONE MUST STAND ALONE. PAUL'S DEDICATION TO PRINCIPLE TOOK HIM TO JAIL SEVERAL TIMES. EVEN ON PAUL'S GOSPEL TEAM THERE WERE THOSE WHO QUIT IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY. (COMPARE JOHN MARK) HOWEVER, DEEPLY INGRAINED IN PAUL'S SPIRITUAL LIFE AND CHRISTIAN MATURITY WAS THAT UNWAVERING DETERMINATION NOT TO RETREAT ONE INCH OF THE GROUND GAINED THROUGH THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL! HIS CRY WAS ONWARD, FORWARD AND UPWARD IN OUR QUEST CHRISTWARD. HOW COULD PAUL MOVE FORWARD IN THE FACE OF SUCH PRESSURES AND ADVERSITY? THE ANSWER MUST BE THAT HIS GOAL IN THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY WAS TO PLEASE JESUS CHRIST AND THE PLAUDITS AND APPRECIATION OF MEN IN NO WAY CHANGED HIS GOAL. SOMEWHERE IN PAUL'S MIND THERE WAS THE LITTLE SLOGAN: "IT'S ALWAYS TOO SOON TO QUIT." (RELATE TO V. R. EDMAN AND DR. IN N. Y.) THE BELIEVER IS EVERYWHERE ENCOURAGED NOT TO QUIT! (LUKE 18:1, GALATIANS 6:9, EPHESIANS 3:13, II THESSALONIANS 3:13 -- NOTICE THE EMPHASIS ON 3:13!)

III. THE CONDUCT OF THE GOSPEL MINISTRY REQUIRES DEDICATION TO TRUTH -- VERSE 2

PAUL REMINDED THE CORINTHIANS THAT THE GOSPEL MINISTRY TRAFFICS IN TRUTH AND NOT TRICKS. PAUL CONDUCTED HIS MINISTRY IN THE OPEN FOR ALL TO SEE. LENSKI HAS WELL SAID: "TRUTH NEEDS NO AIDS. NOTHING IS AS STRONG, AS CONVINCING, AS SURE, AS GOOD, AS THE TRUTH..." IF TRUTH CANNOT WIN THE CONSCIENCE, WHAT COULD BE ADDED TO TRUTH TO MAKE IT MORE EFFECTIVE?

TRUTH NEEDS NO OUTSIDE SUPPORT. LIES CANNOT STAND IN ITS PRESENCE. PAUL WAS NO RELIGIOUS HUCKSTER. HE DID NOT CORRUPT, WATER-DOWN, OR ADULTERATE THE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORD. "TRIMMING THE TRUTH" WAS NOT IN PAUL'S MAKEUP. SOMEONE SAID PAUL COULD LOOK EVERYONE IN THE EYES AND SPEAK WITH HOLY GHOST CANDOR. (COMPARE ACTS 20:20-27) IT WAS MAN'S TAMPERING WITH TRUTH WHICH SHOVED HIM DOWN THE LADDER OF SPIRITUAL DECLINE AND DECAY. (ROMANS 1:18-25) NOTICE JOHN'S EMPHASIS ON THE WORD TRUTH: (JOHN 1:14, 17, 3:21, 4:24, 5:33, 8:32-40, 44, 45, 46, 14:6, 15:26, 16:7, 17:17, 18:32-38) IF THERE IS A CURSE TO MODERN PREACHING, IT IS THE INORDINATE DESIRE OR SEARCH FOR ACCEPTANCE AND POPULARITY. THE SINS OF MANKIND ARE DENIED, IGNORED AND OVERLOOKED, BUT ONLY BY MAN AND NOT BY GOD. SOMEONE HAS SAID THERE IS A DEEP HOSTILITY IN MAN'S NATURE WHICH OBJECTS TO THE TRUTH OF GOD BUT DOES NOT OBJECT TO POSITIVE IDEAS ABOUT HIMSELF. THE GOSPEL IS ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE LIGHT AND ANYONE WHO TURNS ON THE LIGHT TO EYES THAT ARE USED TO DARKNESS WILL SOMETIMES RECEIVE HARSH AND SEVERE REACTIONS -- PAUL RECEIVED SUCH.

IV. THE CONDITION OF THE WORLD IN WHICH THE GOSPEL MINISTRY IS CONDUCTED -- VERSES 3-4

THERE ARE THREE TERMS IN THESE VERSES WHICH DESCRIBE THE CONDITION OF THE WORLD -- "LOST, BLIND, AND DARKNESS." THE WORD LOST IN THE TEXT IS A PRESENT PARTICIPLE WHICH DESCRIBES THE PROCESS OF SLOWLY PERISHING. THIS PARTICULAR WORD IS USED IN SEVERAL IMPORTANT PASSAGES IN SCRIPTURE: I CORINTHIANS 1:18, LUKE 19:10, II PETER 3:8-9, JOHN 3:15-16, JOHN 10:10,28. LOST NOW

ARE TWO WORDS DIFFICULT FOR MEN TO ACCEPT, BUT BECAUSE MEN ARE LOST NOW AND SENTENCE HAS ALREADY BEEN PASSED--JUDGMENT IS THE NEXT DATE ON THE CALENDAR! THE BLINDED MINDS OF MEN WILL NOT LET THEM SEE THEIR DESPERATE PLIGHT. DON'T BLAME GOD FOR THE SPIRITUAL MESS THE WORLD IS IN. SATAN IS THE GREAT BLINDER AND BINDER OF MEN. IF THERE IS HEALING FOR HUMANITY'S HURTS, IT MUST COME FROM GOD AND NOT MAN. SATAN'S GOAL IS TO KEEP THE LIGHT FROM THE GOSPEL AWAY FROM MAN'S MIND IN ORDER THAT HE MAY CONTINUE TO LIVE IN SPIRITUAL DARKNESS. IN THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL, WE ARE ENGAGED IN A BATTLE FOR THE MINDS OF MEN. THE WAY SATAN BLINDS IS TO MAKE THE GOSPEL EITHER A JOKE OR A NEGLECTED IDEA. SIMPLY STATED: "IT NEVER DAWNS" ON THE UNSAVED MAN HOW DESPERATELY HE NEEDS CHRIST AND THE GOSPEL UNTIL HE HEARS THE WORD OF GOD. SATAN BLINDS WITH SUCH THINGS AS PREOCCUPATION, PAGENTRY, PRIDE, PLEASURE, POSSESSIONS, AND PEOPLE. MAN'S SPIRITUAL CONDITION IS CHARACTERIZED BY THE TERM DARKNESS. HE LIVES IN A WORLD OF SPIRITUAL DARKNESS AND THE GOSPEL IS TO THAT WORLD AS LIGHT. (JOHN 3:19, EPHESIANS 5:8, 11, COLOSSIANS 1:13, I PETER 2:9) SIMPLY STATED, THE GOSPEL IS NOT COVERED OR HIDDEN TO ANYONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW OR UNDERSTAND WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS. THE PROBLEM IS THAT SO MANY PEOPLE NEVER GIVE THE BIBLE A VALID HEARING. THEY CHECK OUT OR CLOSE THEIR MINDS TO THE CLAIMS OF THE GOSPEL WITHOUT EVER LISTENING CAREFULLY. A. T. ROBERTSON HAS WELL SAID: "IT IS BY FLAUNTING BEFORE THE EYES OF THE UNBELIEVING THE PERISHING TOYS OF EARTH THAT THE GOD OF THIS WORLD BLINDS THE HEARTS OF MEN TO THE GLORY OF CHRIST AND THE WORTH OF SPIRITUAL LIFE." WE HAVE HAD AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE GOSPEL MINISTRY AND IN THIS PASSAGE, PAUL INVITES THOSE WHO ARE "OUTSIDE AND LOOKING IN" TO COME INTO THE GOSPEL FOLD AND BE SAVED.

ROBERT K. SPRADLING FEBRUARY 7, 1982

A.M.

BCC. AM. Feb. 1991

EARTHEN VESSELS AND ETERNAL VALUES

II CORINTHIANS 4:7-18

IT IS DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND HOW A SMALL BOTTLE 16" HIGH AND DATING BACK TO THE EARLY MING PERIOD IN CHINESE HISTORY COULD BE SOLD IN LONDON FOR OVER $1-MILLION, BUT IT HAPPENED IN 1974. ONE REASON WHY THAT VESSEL IS SO VALUABLE IS THERE ARE ONLY 3 OF ITS TYPE IN THE WORLD. SIMILARLY, A CHINESE WINE JAR SOLD FOR $528,000. A MING VASE BOUGHT BY MR. AND MRS. DOUGLAS OLIVER IN THE 1940'S IN A PHILADELPHIA ANTIQUE SHOP SOLD IN 1976 FOR $260,000. SUCH ARE THE STORIES OF THE VALUABLE VESSELS OF EARTH. SANGSTER REMINDS US THAT WE LIVE IN A TIME OF TWISTED VALUES. FOR EXAMPLE, A SMALL BOY PLAYING WITH HIS FRIENDS, DARTED INTO THE PATH OF A CAR. THE QUICK APPLICATION OF THE BRAKES BY THE DRIVER COULD NOT AVOID THE MISHAP AND THE SICKENING THUD OF FLESH AGAINST FENDERS CREATED A DIRE EMERGENCY. THE BOY WAS PICKED UP AND RUSHED TO THE HOSPITAL. HIS LIMP BODY MADE THE DRIVER OF THE CAR THINK HE WAS DEAD. AS MOTHER AND CAR DRIVER WAITED AT THE HOSPITAL, FINALLY, A DOCTOR EMERGED SMILING AND REPORTED THE CHILD WAS NOT DEAD; AND AS A MATTER OF FACT, THERE WERE NO BROKEN BONES, ONLY A BRUISED HEAD AND FOOT AND THE YOUNGSTER WOULD BE KEPT IN THE HOSPITAL FOR A FEW DAYS FOR OBSERVATION BUT HE WAS ALL RIGHT. WHEN THE MOTHER HURRIED INTO THE CHILD'S HOSPITAL ROOM, AND LOOKED INTO HIS FRIGHTENED FACE, THE CHILD WHIMPERED: "MOMMA, MOMMA -- I'VE LOST MY CAP!" THE CHILD CAME NEAR TO LOSING HIS LIFE, BUT HIS CONCERN WAS OVER THE LOSS OF HIS CAP.

TO BE SURE, THIS IS BOTH UNDERSTANDABLE AND FORGIVABLE IN CHILDREN; BUT IT REMINDS US THAT SOMETIMES WE WEEP OVER TRIFLES AND ARE CARELESS ABOUT TREASURES. PAUL KNEW THE VALUE OF SPIRITUAL TREASURES. (BISHOP SHEEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY IS ENTITLED "TREASURE IN CLAY")

I. THE TREASURE WE HAVE IN EARTHEN VESSELS -- VERSE 7

RELATE CONCERNING LAST SATURDAY'S SALE -- EVERYTHING IN THE HOUSE WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A FEW PRIVATE AND PERSONAL POSSESSIONS UP FOR SALE, INCLUDING THE HOUSE. HUNDREDS LINED UP AND HUNDREDS MORE PASSED THROUGH TO PURCHASE THE ACCUMULATED POSSESSIONS OF ONE FAMILY FOR A LIFETIME. IT REMINDED ME AGAIN OF THE SWIFTNESS OF LIFE, AND THE RELATIVELY FEW THINGS ONE HAS IN THIS LIFE.

RELATE TO DAD AND TWO PLASTIC BAGS. OUR DAUGHTER PURCHASED A BROWN BAG FULL OF CLAY POTS -- 10 FOR $1.00! THEY WERE OLD, USED, AND FRAGILE. ONE OF THE SPECTACULAR ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS OF THIS GENERATION OCCURRED IN THE LATE 1940'S. A BEDOUIN SHEPHERD BOY ACCIDENTLY DISCOVERED SOME CLAY POTS IN A CAVE DOWN NEAR THE DEAD SEA. THE STORY OF THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS IS NOW KNOWN TO MOST CHURCH-GOING PEOPLE. VALUABLE BIBLE MANUSCRIPTS FOUND IN ORDINARY CLAY OR EARTHEN VESSELS! AS A MATTER OF FACT, THERE IS A LIBRARY IN JERUSALEM WHERE THE SCROLLS ARE KEPT DESIGNED IN THE EXACT SHAPE AS THE TOP OF ONE OF THOSE EARTHEN VESSELS. ANCIENT PERSIAN KINGS KEPT THEIR GOLD AND SILVER IN EARTHENWARE JARS. THE STORIES REVEAL THAT THESE KINGS WOULD MELT THE GOLD INTO A LIQUID STATE, POUR IT INTO EARTHEN JARS AND WHEN THEY WANTED THE GOLD, WOULD SIMPLY BREAK THE JARS.

PAUL REMINDED HIS CORINTHIAN BRETHERN THAT HE AND THEY HAVE A PRICELESS TREASURE IN VERY COMMON AND ORDINARY CONTAINERS, THAT IS, THE BODIES OF THE SAINTS. THE MESSENGER OF THE GOSPEL, PAUL HIMSELF, WAS VERY FRAIL INFIRMED AND WEAK IN BODY; BUT THE MESSAGE HE PROCLAIMED WAS BOTH DIVINE AND POWERFUL. ONE OF THE GREAT MYSTERIES OF THE GOSPEL MINISTRY IS THE FACT THAT GOD USES THE UNEXPECTED AND IMPERFECT TO BRING HIS GOOD NEWS TO MANKIND. PAUL'S BODY WAS FRAGILE, FEEBLE, AND LIMITED AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR GOD AND YET THE SECRET OF HIS GOSPEL MINISTRY WAS BOTH THE MESSAGE AND PAUL'S VITAL UNION TO CHRIST. THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL IS CONTAINED IN EARTHEN VESSELS! DR. IRONSIDE REMINDS US OF THE STORY OF GIDEON AS RECORDED IN JUDGES 6,7. THE ARMOUR AND OFFENSIVE WEAPONS OF GIDEON'S 300 WAS A TRUMPET, EMPTY PITCHERS AND LAMPS OR LIGHTS WITHIN THE PITCHERS. WHEN THE 300 BLEW THEIR TRUMPETS AND BROKE THE PITCHERS LETTING THE LIGHTS SHINE IN THE DARKNESS OF THE NIGHT, ABSOLUTE PANIC AND CONFUSION ENVELOPED THE MIDIAN FORCES. THE SECRET OF GIDEON'S VICTORY WAS IN THE BREAKING OF THE VESSEL AND LETTING THE LIGHT SHINE FORTH IN THE DARKNESS. SIMPLY STATED, EVERY BELIEVER IS AN EARTHEN VESSEL WITH A LIGHT INSIDE, BUT IT IS ONLY THE BROKEN VESSELS THAT PRODUCE THE CLEAR LIGHT FOR THE WORLD OF DARKNESS TO SEE. (SOME SAGE HAS SUGGESTED THAT BROKEN VESSELS ARE NOT NECESSARILY CRACKED POTS!)

II. THE TROUBLES WE HAVE ALONG LIFE'S WAY -- VERSES 8-15

MOST BELIEVERS ARE AWARE OF THE ADMONITION IN JAMES 1:2 ABOUT COUNTING IT ALL JOY WHEN WE FALL INTO MANY TESTINGS.

AND YET, IT IS A FACT OF LIFE THAT MOST OF US ARE COWARDS WHEN IT COMES TO TROUBLES AND TRIALS! WE DO NOT SEEK OR DESIRE SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES EVEN THOUGH WE MAY KNOW AND TO SOME DEGREE APPRECIATE THEIR VALUE IN OUR CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE. WE KNOW AS THE VISITOR TO A FAMOUS POTTERY ESTABLISHMENT KNEW THAT THE PROCESS OF MAKING FINE POTTERY INVOLVES SOME APPARENTLY UNUSUAL PROCEDURE. FOR EXAMPLE, AT THIS ONE PARTICULAR ESTABLISHMENT, IN A CERTAIN ROOM, EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE A WORKER WOULD TAKE A LARGE MALLET AND STRIKE SEVERAL HARD BLOWS TO A LARGE LUMP OF CLAY. WHEN ASKED WHY HE DID SUCH A THING THE WORKMAN SAID THAT BUBBLES FORM IN THE CLAY AND IT COULD NEVER BE SHAPED INTO A VASE AS LONG AS THE BUBBLES ARE ALLOWED TO REMAIN, THEREFORE, THE MASS WAS BEATEN UNTIL GRADUALLY THE BUBBLES ARE WORKED OUT. WE KNOW, THAT THE DISCIPLINES OF LIFE ARE TAKING OUT THE BUBBLES OF PRIDE AND SELF-WILL IN ORDER THAT THE LORD MAY HAVE A VESSEL ON EARTH FIT FOR HIS GLORY. HOWEVER, WE STILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO WELCOME SUCH EXPERIENCES.

IN THESE VERSES, PAUL DESCRIBES THE DIFFICULTIES OF LIFE IN A SERIES OF PARADOXES: (1) "WE ARE TROUBLED ON EVERY SIDE, BUT NOT DISTRESSED" -- VERSE 8. THERE ARE SEVERAL IDEAS SUGGESTED IN THE WORD PICTURE OF THIS VERSE. IT IS THAT OF GRAPES IN A WINEPRESS BEING SQUEEZED UNTIL THE LAST DROP OF JUICE IS IN THE VAT. IT IS THE PICTURE OF SOMEONE PRESSED DOWN AND HEMMED IN WITH PRESSURES ON ALL SIDES TO THE POINT THAT HE IS UNABLE TO MOVE. (RELATE TRAILER EXPERIENCE AT GRACE SEMINARY.) SOMEONE HAS SUGGESTED THAT THIS VERSE SUGGESTS BEING IN A CORNER BUT NOT CORNERED. EVERY PERSON KNOWS WHAT IT IS TO BE BACKED INTO A TIGHT PLACE SO NARROW AND TIGHT THAT THERE SEEMS TO BE NO WAY OUT.

ONE MAY BE HEMMED IN, BUT THERE IS ALWAYS A WAY OUT -- ALWAYS. PHILLIPS' TRANSLATION OF I CORINTHIANS 10:13 IS GREAT: "NO TEMPTATION HAS COME YOUR WAY THAT IS TOO HARD TO BEAR. BUT GOD CAN BE TRUSTED NOT TO ALLOW YOU TO SUFFER ANY TEMPTATION BEYOND YOUR POWERS OF ENDURANCE. HE WILL SEE TO IT THAT EVERY TEMPTATION HAS A WAY OUT, SO THAT IT WILL NEVER BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR YOU TO BEAR IT."

(2) "WE ARE PERPLEXED, BUT NOT IN DISPAIR"--VERSE 8. THE WORD PERPLEXED SUGGESTS TO BE PUZZLED OR AT WIT'S END. ONE COMMENTATOR HAS SUGGESTED: "WE ARE BEWILDERED, BUT NOT BENIGHTED." THE IDEA IS THAT THE BELIEVER DOES NOT KNOW WHY CERTAIN THINGS HAPPEN, YET HE DOES NOT GIVE UP IN THE MIDST OF LIFE'S DIFFICULTIES. AS A MATTER OF FACT, WE MAY NOT EVEN KNOW WHAT SHOULD BE DONE IN CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES. THERE IS A SMALL CHURCH IN PHYLLIS, KENTUCKY, WHERE THE PASTOR HAS LABORED TO THE SAME CONGREGATION FOR 32 YEARS. DURING THAT TIME, HE RAISED FIVE CHILDREN -- ALL WHO WERE COLLEGE GRADUATES, AND HE NOW HAS TEN GRANDCHILDREN. THE PASTOR OF THAT SMALL CHURCH HAD TO WORK AS A CARPENTER AND FOLLOW CONSTRUCTION WORK IN ADDITION TO PASTORING THE SMALL CHURCH, SIMPLY BECAUSE THE CONGREGATION COULD NOT SUSTAIN A FULL-TIME PASTOR. DURING THOSE 32 YEARS OF WORK AND MINISTRY, THE PASTOR WAS UNABLE TO BUILD UP MUCH IN THE WAY OF RETIREMENT BENEFITS AND SINCE HE WAS APPROACHING HIS 62ND BIRTHDAY HE WAS ENCOURAGED TO PICK UP THE KIND OF JOB WHICH WOULD ENHANCE HIS RETIREMENT BENEFIT. SIX MONTHS AGO, HE WENT TO WORK IN A SMALL MINE NEAR PHELPS, KENTUCKY. THE MINE WAS INSPECTED REGULARLY BOTH BY THE MINE OWNER AND THE STATE AND FEDERAL AUTHORITIES BUT WHAT PASTOR ADAMS WAS DOING, NAMELY, PULLING TIMBERS OUT OF THE MINE WAS CONSIDERED DANGEROUS WORK.

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HE WAS CAUTIONED BY THE OWNER TO BE CAREFUL AND REPLIED IN A JOKING MANNER: "IF SOMETHING HAPPENS I'M READY TO GO." A FEW WEEKS AGO, WHAT THE OWNER FEARED DID HAPPEN. WHILE CURTIS ADAMS AND A FELLOW WORKER WERE PULLING TIMBERS OUT THE MINE ~~A FREAK~~ AN ACCIDENT OCCURRED -- THE ROOF FELL IN ON THEM! APPARENTLY, THERE WAS NO WAY TO DETECT THE BAD ROOF IT SIMPLY FELL. CURTIS ADAMS LEFT A WIDOW, FIVE CHILDREN, TEN GRANDCHILDREN AND A SORROWING CHURCH WHERE HE WILL BE SORELY MISSED. CURTIS ADAMS WAS A HARD-WORKING SPIRITUAL MAN. HE WAS NOT AN IMPRESSIVE OR IMPOSING FIGURE. SMALL IN SIZE, SOFT-SPOKEN AND ALMOST SHY, HE HAD RAISED HIS FAMILY, SERVED THE LORD IN THE SAME PLACE FOR OVER A QUARTER OF A CENTURY. ONE MIGHT EXPECT HIS FAMILY TO BE BITTER BUT THEY WEREN'T. THEIR CONCERN IS THAT THE MINE OWNER WHO WAS SO CLOSE TO THE FAMILY THAT HE ~~AS QUITE~~ SAT WITH THEM DURING THE FUNERAL SERVICE -- THEIR CONCERN IS THAT THIS MINE OWNER MIGHT COME TO KNOW JESUS CHRIST AS LORD AND SAVIOR.

SOMETIMES MEMBERS OF THIS CONGREGATION ARE A BIT UPSET WITH ME BECAUSE I CANNOT TELL THEM FROM SCRIPTURE THAT ALL WILL BE WELL AND THERE WILL BE NO PUZZLING, FRIGHTENING, DIFFICULT SITUATIONS IN LIFE...BUT THIS IS SIMPLY NOT THE CASE! THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO CLOSE THEIR EYES TO THE FACTS OF LIFE, AND THE FACTS OF SCRIPTURE AND LIVE IN A DREAM WORLD OF UNREALITY WILL SUDDENTLY BE FORCED TO FACE THE FACTS OF LIFE BECAUSE THESE THINGS SIMPLY DO HAPPEN. WHEN THEY DO, PAUL REMINDS US WE DON'T QUIT OR GIVE IN.

(3) "PERSECUTED, BUT NOT FORSAKEN" -- VERSE 9. THE WORD "PERSECUTE" LITERALLY MEANS TO PURSUE. THE IDEA IS THAT OF ONE MAN DOGGING ANOTHER'S TRACKS UNTIL HE IS CAUGHT.

THE MARTYRS WERE MEN WHO WERE PURSUED BY OTHER MEN. WHEN AND IF THIS HAPPENS TO A CHRISTIAN WE MAY KNOW AND UNDERSTAND THAT GOD DOES NOT FORSAKE HIS OWN IN THAT DESPERATE HOUR. (4) "CAST DOWN, BUT NOT DESTROYED" -- VERSE 9. THE PHILLIPS' TRANSLATION SAYS: "KNOCKED DOWN BUT NOT KNOCKED OUT." JUDE SPEAKS OF OUR GREAT SECURE POSITION IN CHRIST FROM WHICH WE CANNOT FALL. HOWEVER, EXPERIENTIALLY WE DO FAIL AND FALTER. MANY CHAMPIONS HAVE KNOWN WHAT IT MEANS TO BE DOWN FROM A MIGHTY BLOW BUT NOT TO STAY DOWN, BUT TO COME UP AGAIN, TO FIGHT AGAIN AND TO WIN. LOSS OF A BATTLE DOES NOT MEAN LOSS OF THE WAR. SATAN DOES GET IN HIS LICKS FROM TIME TO TIME BUT THE SPIRITUAL BELIEVER IN THE POWER OF CHRIST REFUSES TO STAY DOWN. THE RE-MATCH BETWEEN MOHAMMED ALI AND JOE FRAZIER IN OCTOBER 1975 IS REPORTED TO HAVE HAD 1-BILLION VIEWERS, THAT IS, ONE QUARTER OF THE PEOPLE ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH. ONE QUARTER (25%) OF THE PEOPLE OF THIS EARTH WERE WATCHING TWO MEN FIGHT FOR LESS THAN AN HOUR FOR MILLIONS OF DOLLARS. I WONDER IF THE ANGELS IN GLORY DON'T CHEER WHEN THEY VIEW EARTH AND SEE THE SAINTS GETTING UP AND GOING ON IN THE FACE OF THE TESTINGS, TRIALS, AND DISAPPOINTMENTS OF LIFE. (5) "ALWAYS BEARING ABOUT IN THE BODY, THE DYING OF THE LORD JESUS, THAT THE LIFE..." --VERSE 10. PAUL SAID THAT HE WAS A DYING PERSON WITH A LIVING MESSAGE. EVERY DAY OF HIS LIFE, PAUL LIKE YOU AND ME, WAS ONE DAY NEARER DEATH. A DYING MAN PREACHING TO DYING MEN ABOUT LIFE AND HOPE AFTER DEATH. IN THE PRESENCE OF DEATH, PAUL SAYS THERE IS BOTH LIFE AND RESURRECTION.

IN VERSE 16, PAUL SPOKE OF A PRINCIPLE OF LIFE, NAMELY THAT THE OUTWARD MAN IS PERISHING DAY BY DAY, BUT THE INWARD MAN OR THE SOUL KEEPS ON GROWING. OUR GOAL OR END IS NOT DEATH BUT IN GOD WHO RAISES MEN FROM THE DEAD. THEREFORE, IT WOULD SEEM PRUDENT FOR MEN TO MAJOR ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INWARD MAN AND NOT SO MUCH ATTENTION GIVEN TO THE OUTSIDE OR OUTWARD MAN!
QUESTION: WHERE IS ALL THE ATTENTION GIVEN TODAY?

III. THE TENURE OF LIFE AS IT RELATES TO ETERNITY -- VERSES 16-18

THE PRESENT DIFFICULTIES OR AFFLICTIONS OF LIFE ARE DESCRIBED AS LIGHT AND MOMENTARY, PASSING AWAY. SOMEONE HAS SAID THAT THE WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE IS A BRIDGE AND WISE MEN WILL PASS OVER IT BUT WILL NOT BUILD THEIR HOUSES UPON IT. MAN IS AFTER ALL A RESIDENT ALIEN ON EARTH, A PILGRIM TO THIS WORLD, MOVING IN TIME TOWARD ETERNITY. AT BEST, THE THINGS WHICH WE GAZE UPON WITH THE NATURAL EYE ARE TEMPORARY OR TEMPORAL. THE WISE OF THIS WORLD HAVE LOOKED BEYOND THIS LIFE INTO THE FACE OF THINGS ETERNAL. AS A MATTER OF FACT, EVERY MAN MUST FACE ETERNITY. FOR SOME MEN ETERNITY MEANS GLORY AND TREASURE. FOR OTHERS ETERNITY MEANS AGONY AND TORMENT. (SEVERAL YEARS AGO I SAT ON A BEACH IN FLORIDA AND WATCHED WHILE A MAN MOVED AN INSTRUMENT THAT LOOKED LIKE A CANE WITH A BOX ON THE END OF IT ACROSS THE SAND. AS I WATCHED WITH THE NAKED EYE, I COULD SEE ABSOLUTELY NOTHING BUT FROM TIME TO TIME AS HE WATCHED HIS CANE-LIKE INSTRUMENT, HE WOULD STOP, SCRATCH IN THE SAND AND COME UP WITH COINS OR RINGS OR OTHER METAL OBJECTS. YOU SEE, WHAT I COULD NOT DETECT WITH THE NATURAL EYE, HE COULD DETECT WITH HIS METAL DETECTOR.

FAITH IS LIKE THAT, IT ENABLES MEN TO DISCERN ETERNAL THINGS IN CONTRAST TO THE MATERIAL AND TEMPORAL THINGS OF THIS WORLD. THE EQUIPMENT AND APPARATUS WITH WHICH YOU AND I ARE BORN ARE LIMITED TO PLANET EARTH. GOD GIVES FAITH TO THOSE WHO WILL HEED HIS WORD AND LOOK BEYOND THIS LIFE AND INTO THE ETERNAL DIMENSION. GOD HAS DEVOTED AN ENTIRE CHAPTER TO THIS IDEA -- HEBREWS 11:1FF

ROBERT K. SPRADLING FEBRUARY 14, 1982
A.M.

"A HOUSE NOT MADE WITH HANDS"

II CORINTHIANS 5:1-10

BUILDINGS FASCINATE ME. WHEREVER WE HAVE TRAVELED, THERE HAS BEEN A TENDENCY TO REMEMBER AREAS BY THE OUTSTANDING STRUCTURES. FOR EXAMPLE, IN JERUSALEM - THE DOME OF THE ROCK, LOCATED ON MT. MORIAH, WHERE MOHAMMED SUPPOSEDLY ROSE TO HEAVEN -NOT TO MENTION OTHER STRUCTURES IN THE CITY. CAIRO - MINA HOUSE TRINIDAD & PORT OF SPAI HILTON HOTEL, DOWN TO THIRD FLOOR. ROME - ST. PETER'S BASILICA, AND THE SISTINE CHAPEL - VATICAN ARCHITECTURE. Univ. of Mex. MEXICO CITY - SHRINE OF GUADELUPE. FROM THE HUTS OF HAITI TO THE HIGH RISES OF HOUSTON THE FASCINATING BUILDINGS ARE OF GREAT INTEREST TO ME. (RELATE MR. CALLIGAN'S VISIT THIS WEEK REGARDING WINDOW WALL AND MOSLEM MOSQUE, $80 MILLION STRUCTURE, $1 MILLION GLASS CONTRACT)

OF ALL THE BUILDINGS MENTIONED, NOT ONE WAS MADE WITHOUT THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF HUMAN MINDS AND HUMAN HANDS. THE TEXT TODAY, SPEAKS OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF A HOUSE NOT MADE WITH OR BY HUMAN HANDS! AND OF ALL THE HOUSES I HAVE EVER SEEN, OR EVER HOPE TO SEE, THIS IS BY FAR THE MOST FASCINATING!

I. A "BODY-BACK" GUARANTEE - v. 1-5

MOST OF US ARE AWARE OF MONEY BACK GUARANTEES BUT THESE VERSES SPEAK OF A GUARANTEE WHICH STAGGERS THE MIND. THE WORD "HOUSE" IN V. 1 IS REFERRING TO THE HUMAN BODY. THE WORDS EARTHLY HOUSE LITERALLY MEAN A "TENT HOUSE." THE WORD DISSOLVED LITERALLY MEANS TO STRIKE A TENT OR LOOSE THE ROPES AND PEGS SO THAT THE STRETCHED CANVAS WILL COLLAPSE. IN THESE VERSES, PAUL LIKENS OUR EARTHLY BODIES TO A TENT WHICH AT BEST IS TEMPORARY HOUSING. BY CONTRAST, HE SAYS THAT WHEN THIS EARTHLY TENT IS TAKEN DOWN THE BELIEVER HAS A PERMANENT HOME OR BODY IN HEAVEN.

AT DEATH, OUR EARTHLY BODY GOES TO THE GRAVE AND REMAINS ON EARTH, BUT OUR SOUL-SPIRIT GOES TO BE WITH THE LORD. THERE IS GREAT THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE AS TO THE CONDITION OF THE PERSON DURING THAT TIME. SOME BELIEVE IN AN INTERMEDIATE BODY, WHICH MY THEOLOGY TEACHER BELIEVED, OTHERS DO NOT. HOWEVER, THESE VERSES CONTRAST AN EARTHLY BODY AND A HEAVENLY BODY. THAT BUILDING IS SAID TO BE "OF" OR LITERALLY "EK" FROM GOD, REFERRING TO ITS SOURCE. GOD MADE IT THUS IT CAN NEVER BE TAKEN DOWN OR DESTROYED. PAUL SAID THIS BIBLE FACT IS SOMETHING "WE KNOW... WE HAVE." IN THE FOLLOWING VERSES PAUL SPEAKS OF OUR PRESENT CONDITION IN THIS TENT-LIKE BODY TO BE ONE OF SIGHING FOR BETTER CONDITIONS. EVERY PERSON WHO HAS EVER WALKED THROUGH A HOSPITAL OR NURSING HOME AND LISTENED TO THE "SIGHS OF SICKNESS" RECOGNIZES THE TRUTH OF THIS STATEMENT. (COMMENT REGARDING RUTH GRAHAM) THE TERM "CLOTHED" IS USED TO DESCRIBE WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN WHEN THIS EARTHLY BODY GIVES WAY TO OUR HEAVENLY ONE. JUST AS MOST PEOPLE LOOK FORWARD TO NEW CLOTHES WHEN OLD ONES WEAR OUT, SO WHEN THESE EARTHLY BODIES WEAR OUT THERE IS A NEW AND BETTER ONE AWAITING THE CHILD OF GOD IN HEAVEN. ALSO, ACCORDING TO V. 3, WHEN DEATH STRIKES THIS TENT-BODY, WE WILL NOT BE SOULS OR SPIRITS BUMPING AROUND OR FLOATING AROUND IN SPACE, BUT WILL HAVE BODIES. (RELATE TO THE DESIRE DEMONS WHO SO WANT TO INDWELL A BODY THAT THEY WOULD INDWELL SWINE.) THE KEY VERSE TO THIS SECTION IS THE FACT THAT THE FULL GUARANTEE OF SUCH A "BODY-BACK GUARANTEE" IS THE DOWNPAYMENT GIVEN TO US BY GOD IN THE PERSON OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. WE KNOW THIS WILL COME TO PASS, NOT BECAUSE SOME RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY HAS TALKED ABOUT IT, BUT BECAUSE THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD HIMSELF GUARANTEES SUCH A TRANSACTION. WHEN WE "CASH IN" OUR EARTHLY TENT, WE HAVE A PERMANENT HOUSE IN HEAVEN OF DIVINE ORIGIN AND MAKING WHICH WILL NEVER PERISH! WE ARE ALL CONCERNED WITH THE CONDITION AND APPEARANCE OF THESE EARTHLY BODIES BUT A BETTER ONE AWAITS US BEYOND THE GRAVE!

Trade a "tent" for a "mansion".

(RELATE ILLUSTRATION OF G.R.S. IN FLA. AND BEAUTY TREATMENT. IT WAS A GREAT EXPERIENCE.... TEENAGER.....MY CONVERSATION WITH RECEPTIONIST AND HER REPLY THAT THEY COULD MAKE PEOPLE BEAUTIFUL BUT COULD NOT PERFORM MIRACLES! MUD PACK.)

IT IS DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND AND APPRECIATI THE ENORMITY OF THIS WONDERFUL PROMISE IN THE WORD OF GOD!

II. THE OTHER SIDE OF DEATH - vs.6-8

DEATH IS A SUBJECT MANY PEOPLE CAN'T OR WON'T TALK ABOUT. SOME FOLK WHO ARE TALKING ABOUT THE SUBJECT ARE SAYING THE WRONG THINGS, FOR THEY ARE PROPOSING A SENSE OF FALSE SECURITY AMONG THE UNSAVED. (COMMENT RE: LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL, WARM FEELING, GLOWING PERSON, AND VARIOUS IDEAS PROJECTED BY THOSE WHO ARE SUPPOSED TO HAVE "DIED" AND RETURNED FROM THAT EXPERIENCE. PLEASE REMEMBER THAT SATAN IS CALLED AN "ANGEL OF LIGHT.")

PEOPLE WHO ARE RESTING THEIR HOPES ON A KIND OF HALFWAY HOUSE BETWEEN EARTH AND THE ETERNAL WHERE MEN GET "THE DEVIL BEATEN OUT OF THEM" BY THE PRAYERS AND PENNANCE OF THOSE ON EARTH SHOULD ABANDON THAT IDEA ON THE STRENGTH OF THIS VERSE, IF FOR NO OTHER REASON! THE BIBLE STATES CLEARLY AND CATEGORICALLY THAT ONCE A MAN DIES IN WHATEVER STATE HE DIES, HE REMAINS FOREVER. THE IDEA OF PURGATORY AND SOUL SLEEP ARE SIMPLY NOT TAUGHT IN THE WORD OF GOD! LOOK AT PAUL'S POSITIVE LANGUAGE IN THESE VERSES. THE WORD CONFIDENT IN TWO VERSES SPEAKS OF GOOD COURAGE AND CHEER. THIS IS CERTAINLY NOT THE WAY THE WORLD AND THE UNSAVED LOOK AT DEATH. FOR THEM, IT IS AN EXPERIENCE OF MISGIVING, MISUNDERSTANDING AND THE LOSS OF EVERYTHING! BY CONTRAST, PAUL ENCOURAGED THE CORINTHIANS TO BE COURAGEOUS AND OF GOOD CHEER BECAUSE WHEN WE GO AWAY FROM HOME HERE ON EARTH

WE COME HOME TO THE LORD IN GLORY. GOODNIGHT DOWN HERE ON EARTH MEANS GOOD MORNING UP THERE. (PHIL. 1:21-23) TO BE SURE, TO LEAVE LOVED ONES AND FAMILIAR ASSOCIATION IS A DIFFICULT TASK, BUT THE BELIEVER SHOULD NOT BE GLOOMY AND DEPRESSED WITH THE PROSPECT OF BEING IMMEDIATELY WITH CHRIST FOREVER! EVERY PERSON MUST FACE THE FACT OF DEATH. UNLESS THE RAPTURE TAKES PLACE, WE ALL MUST LOOK DEATH SQUARELY IN THE FACE. IN DOING THAT, WE MUST ARM OURSELVES WITH THE CLEAR DECLARATION OF SCRIPTURE. FOR EXAMPLE, I COR. 15:51-58 SPEAKS OF OUR LORD'S VICTORY OVER THE GRAVE AND CONSEQUENTLY OUR VICTORY, TOO. MOST OF US HAVE LOST LOVED ONES AND I MUST SAY WITH ALL CANDOR THAT I DO NOT REGRET NOR WOULD I HAVE THEM RETURN TO EARTH FOR THEY ARE FAR BETTER OFF WITH HIM THAN WITH US. OF COURSE, WE SORROW AND SENSE A LOSS THAT IS MOMENTARY, TEMPORARY AND SHORT TERM, BUT FAITH ENABLES THE CHRISTIAN TO LOOK BEYOND THIS PERIOD IN TIME TO ETERNITY TOGETHER WITH HIM. EARTH IS NOT OUR FINAL HOME, WE ARE INDEED PILGRIMS, ALIENS, SPIRITUAL REFUGEES PASSING THROUGH EARTH TO OUR ETERNAL HOME. THE VERY WORD HOME HAS A WONDERFUL SOUND AND TOUCHES THE LONGING HUMAN HEART FOR A PLACE OF LOVE, HAPPINESS AND SECURITY, MUCH OF WHICH IS MISSING IN EARTHLY HOMES, BUT WILL BE FULFILLED IN CHRIST'S PRESENCE. WE ARE ABLE TO MAKE THESE CONFIDENT STATEMENTS ACCORDING TO THE PRINCIPLE OF V. 7. FAITH IN GOD'S PROMISES ENABLES US TO DEAL WITH UNSEEN THINGS AS REAL NEVERTHELESS. MANY PEOPLE HAVE DIFFICULTY WITH THE WORD FAITH BECAUSE THEIR FAITH HAS BEEN MISPLACED IN PEOPLE WHO WERE NOT TRUSTWORTHY. (RELATE WOMAN WHOSE HUSBAND LEFT HER AND SOUGHT TO TAKE EVERYTHING.) HOWEVER, FAITH THAT IS PLACED IN AN INFINITE PERSON WHO NOT ONLY WILL NOT BUT CAN NOT LIE, IS A SURE FAITH! HEAVEN IS AS SURE FOR THE BELIEVER AS IT IS FOR GOD HIMSELF! A ROUGH TRANSLATION OR READING OF THE GREEK TEXT IN V. 8

IS HELPFUL: "WE ARE OF GOOD CHEER...AND THINK IT GOOD RATHER TO GO AWAY FROM HOME, OUT OF THE BODY, IN OTHER WORDS LEAVE OUR TENT-DWELLING ON EARTH, AND COME HOME TO THE LORD." THERE IS ALSO A PREPOSITIONAL THRUST IN THE TEXT. WHILE WERE ARE IN THE BODY, WE ARE AWAY FROM THE LORD. WHEN WE ARE OUT OF OUR EARTHLY BODY, WE WILL THEN COME FACE TO FACE WITH JESUS! (FACE TO FACE EQUALS PROS, CF. JOHN 1) (A PASTOR SAT IN AN AIRPORT WAITING AREA READING HIS BIBLE. SEVERAL PEOPLE AROUND NOTICED WITH CURIOSITY AND WHEN THE PASTOR CLOSED THE BIBLE, ONE ENGAGED HIM IN CONVERSATION. UPON LEARNING OF HIS CALLING, THE STRANGER SPOKE OF A FRIEND-A GOOD PERSON-WHO HAD COMMITTED SUICIDE RECENTLY. THE MAN SAID "MAY I ASK YOU A QUESTION?" "CERTAINLY," WAS THE PREACHER'S REPLY. "WHERE DID THE SUICIDE VICTIM GO AFTER HE DIED?" THE MINISTER THOUGHT FOR A MOMENT AND SAID THAT QUESTION WAS SIMPLE TO ANSWER. "HE WENT TO HIS OWN PLACE, WHERE YOU AND I SHALL GO. EVERYONE GOES TO THE PLACE FOR WHICH HE HAS PREPARED, AND WHICH HAS BEEN PREPARED FOR HIM. JESUS SAID THAT HE WENT TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR THOSE WHO KNEW AND LOVED HIM. (JOHN 14:1-3) QUESTION: DID YOUR FRIEND LOVE AND SERVE THE LORD JESUS WHEN HE WAS ON EARTH? IF SO, HE WENT TO THAT PLACE JESUS IS PREPARING FOR HIS OWN, AND IN THE WORDS OF SCRIPTURE, HE WENT TO BE WITH THE LORD. FOR THOSE WHO HAVE IGNORED JESUS CHRIST DURING THIS LIFE THERE IS ANOTHER PLACE PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS AND THOSE WHO CHOOSE NOT TO SERVE THE LORD. IT IS A PLACE OF OUTER DARKNESS, THE ETERNAL PRISONHOUSE OF A SOVEREIGN GOD, PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS AND ALL WHO REFUSE JESUS CHRIST. NOW, FRIEND, YOU TELL ME WHERE DID YOUR FRIEND GO?")

III. THE BEMA AND THE BELIEVER - vs. 9-10

THE WORD LABOR IN V. 9 CARRIES THE IDEA OF AFFECTION, HONOR AND AMBITIOUS. THE VERSE SUGGESTS THAT THE BELIEVER'S HIGHEST PRIORITY AND GREATEST HONOR IS TO HAVE AS HIS GOAL IN LIFE TO BE ACCEPTED OR LITERALLY WELL PLEASING TO CHRIST. IT IS A POINT OF HONOR THAT WE SERVE CHRIST IN A WELL PLEASING MANNER. LET ME UNDERSCORE THIS FACT; PAUL SPEAKS OF A TIME AND PLACE WHERE OUR SERVICE FOR CHRIST, OUR MOTIVATION AND REASONS WILL BE CAREFULLY SCRUTINIZED OR EXAMINED! THE LACK OF SENSITIVITY AND CONCERN FOR SERVICE THAT HAS CREPT INTO THE BUSINESS WORLD HAS ALSO LEFT ITS MARK ON THE CHURCH. IF YOU TRAVEL, YOU KNOW THERE ARE MANY PLACES IN THE U.S. WHERE SERVICE PERSONNEL GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THEY DO NOT CARE TO PLEASE THEIR CONSTITUENTS! (MOST PEOPLE CAN TELL OF AN EXPERIENCE IN A RESTAURANT OR MOTEL OR SOME OTHER BUSINESS WHERE THEY HAVE BEEN IGNORED AND INSULTED BY THE SERVICE PEOPLE - RELATE TO N.Y. AIRPORT-THE ABSOLUTE WORST!)

IT IS A POINT OF HONOR FOR THE BELIVER THAT HIS LIFE BE WELL PLEASING TO JESUS CHRIST. EVERY STUDENT OF SCRIPTURE IS AWARE OF A COMING APPOINTMENT AND I MUST CONFESS THE THOUGHT OF SUCH AN APPOINTMENT IS A BIT FRIGHTENING! THE TERM APPEAR IS SAID BY SOME COMMENTATORS TO REFER TO PUBLIC MANIFESTATION. THE WORDS JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST IS ONE GREEK WORD-BEMA. THIS TERM REFERRED TO THE DIAS OR PLATFORM ON WHICH THE CHAIR FOR THE JUDGE STANDS, AND FROM WHICH HE PRONOUNCED HIS VERDICT. IT WAS ALSO THE PLACE WHERE AWARDS AND REWARDS WERE HANDED OUT TO DESERVING CITIZENS. PAUL GAVE THE CORINTHIANS A MORE DETAILED ACCOUNT OF THAT JUDGMENT IN I COR. 3:13-15. AT THAT JUDGMENT AS OUR WORKS ARE SUBJECTED TO THE REFINING FIRE OF GOD'S TEST, THE NATURE OF EACH MAN'S WORK ON EARTH WILL BE REVEALED AND REWARDED OR NOT REWARDED. ACCORDING TO THIS PASSAGE, IT IS

POSSIBLE FOR A MAN'S LIFE WORK TO CRUMBLE UNDER THE TEST FIRE AND ALL REWARD IS LOST THOUGH THE MAN HIMSELF IS RESCUED. MOST BELIEVERS WHO HAVE A GRASP OF SCRIPTURE UNDERSTAND THAT THIS JUDGMENT IS FOR CHRISTIANS ONLY AND DETERMINES THEIR REWARD AND NOT DESTINY. HAS IT EVER OCCURRED TO YOU WHAT A SOLEMN THOUGHT THIS VERSE BRINGS? SOME DAY OUR OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE CHRIST WILL BE OVER AND WHEN WE STAND AT THE BEMA-SEAT HE WILL REVIEW OUR LIFE OF SERVICE AND GIVE HIS ESTIMATE OF WHAT WE HAVE DONE. THEN, AND PERHAPS ONLY THEN, WILL SOME OF US FACE THE REALITY OF WHO WE HAVE REALLY SERVED HERE ON EARTH. IN THAT DAY WE WILL KNOW WHETHER WE HAVE BEEN MEN PLEASERS OR CHRIST-PLEASERS. SURELY A VERSE WITH THIS SOLEMN TONE WOULD WAKE UP THE LORD'S PEOPLE TO STOP PLAYING GAMES WITH GOD AND GET BUSY AND PREPARE FOR FINAL EXAMS!

ROBERT K. SPRADLING FEBRUARY 21, 1982

May 1991 - PM. (Boc)

"WHAT JESUS WOULD SAY IF HE WERE PREACHING HERE TODAY"

II Corinthians 5:14-21

Our subject today is based on Paul's declaration in verse 20. As Christ's ambassador, Paul spoke to the Corinthians as a representative of our blessed Lord as though Christ Himself were pleading to the Corinthians to be reconciled to God. In other words, that was the message Christ had for the Corinthians - "Be ye reconciled to God." What does this mean? "God in His changless and unwearing love, has taken the initiative, has broken into the atmosphere of man's hostility, and has thrown down every estranging barrier that guilt and hopelessness and dull resentment can erect." (James Stewart) Simply stated, the willing God is seeking to bring unwilling men into fellowship and communion with Himself. God is the reconciler and man is the reconciled. The need for reconciliation is based on the fact that the sin and God cannot go together. Sin has raised barriers, alienating man from God, putting a cloud of estrangement between God and man. Therefore, until the sin problem has been dealt with, man is isolated from fellowship with God which was God's original purpose in creation. In Roman's 5:10, Paul describes man's hostility and resentment toward God: "If, while we were His enemies, Christ reconciled us to God by dying for us, surely now that we are reconciled we may be perfectly certain of our salvation through His living in us." (Phillips Translation) Why is this so important? It seems to me, that the greatest service one person can render to another is to point him to Christ and explain how it is possible to enjoy a right relationship to God. All other objectives in life, in the long view, seem to be empty, meaningless, and

UNSATISFYING APART FROM THIS ETERNAL RESPONSIBILITY. THEREFORE, IF JESUS WERE SPEAKING HERE TODAY HE WOULD TALK ABOUT MAN'S NEED OF BEING RECONCILED TO GOD. I WONDER HOW MANY WOULD BE HERE TO HEAR HIM OR WOULD SIMPLY HAVE GONE ELSEWHERE? IN THE SCRIPTURE BEFORE US, I WOULD LIKE TO SUGGEST SEVERAL OTHER IDEAS OR THEMES WHICH OUR LORD MIGHT MENTION WERE HE SPEAKING FROM THIS PASSAGE TODAY.

I. HE MIGHT TALK ABOUT THE LOVE OF CHRIST - VERSE 15

GOD IN CHRIST Loves Us

THE LOVE OF CHRIST REFERS PRIMARILY TO HIS LOVE FOR US BECAUSE ANY LOVE WE HAVE FOR HIM IS BASED ON THE FACT THAT HE LOVED US FIRST. THE MOFFATT TRANSLATION SAYS OF THIS VERSE: "I AM CONTROLLED BY THE LOVE OF CHRIST." THE LOVE OF OUR BLESSED LORD, SENT PAUL INTO THE WORLD TO WIN MEN TO CHRIST. I COULD UNDERSTAND HOW IN A MOMENT OF TRADGEDY AND CRISIS A COURAGOUS PERSON MIGHT GIVE HIS LIFE FOR HIS FELLOW MAN. (RELATE AIR FLORIDA ACCIDENT IN WASH. D.C. - 1982 - SEE NEWSPAPER CLIPPING.) BUT, HOW A SINLESS PERSON WOULD BE WILLING FOR THE SAKE OF SINFUL MISERABLE MEN TO ENDURE THE AGONY OF A CROSS AND DIE FOR THOSE WHO ARE OPENLY HOSTILE AND REBELLIOUS TO HIS LOVE DEFIES EXPLANATION! SIMPLY STATED, JESUS CHRIST LOVED AND DIED FOR THOSE WHO DID NOT LOVE HIM. HIS WORK ON THE CROSS IS STILL AVAILABLE TO MEN WHO PAY NO ATTENTION TO HIS GREAT WORK THERE. SOMETIMES PEOPLE GET THE FALSE IMPRESSION THAT GOD HATES THEM. IT IS DIFFICULT FOR MAN TO SEPARATE OR UNDERSTAND HOW GOD COULD HATE SIN AND LOVE THE SINNER AT ONE AND THE SAME TIME! THE BIBLE ABOUNDS WITH VERSES WHICH SPEAK TO THIS VERY POINT: "IN HUMAN EXPERIENCE IT IS A RARE THING FOR ONE MAN TO GIVE HIS LIFE FOR ANOTHER, EVEN IF THE LATTER BE A GOOD MAN, THOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN A FEW WHO HAVE HAD THE COURAGE TO DO IT. YET THE PROOF OF GOD'S

AMAZING LOVE IS THIS: THAT IT WAS WHILE WE WERE SINNERS THAT CHRIST DIED FOR US." (ROMANS 5:8 - PHILLIPS TRANSLATION). JOHN 3:16, REVELATION 1:5: "TO HIM WHO LOVES US AND HAS SET US FREE FROM OUR SINS THROUGH HIS OWN BLOOD, WHO HAS MADE US A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS TO HIS GOD AND FATHER, TO HIM BE GLORY AND POWER FOR TIMELESS AGES, AMEN! (THE PHRASE IN THE TEXT "THE BLOOD OF CHRIST" IS A SYNONYM FOR THE DEATH OF CHRIST. IN OTHER WORDS THE PRICE HE PAID FOR OUR REDEMPTION. HE GAVE HIS LIFE'S BLOOD AS AN EXPRESSION OF HIS LOVE FOR MANKIND." PLEASE NOTE THAT LOVE AND SACRIFIC GO TOGETHER."

II. HE MIGHT TALK ABOUT THE FACT THAT CHRIST DIED FOR US VERSUS 14-15

FOR CENTURIES, THERE HAS BEEN GREAT THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSION AND DIVISION CONCERNING IDENTITY OF ALL AND US IN OUR TEXT. IN OTHER, WORDS FOR WHOM DID CHRIST DIE - THE WHOLE WORLD OR THE ELECT ONLY? IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THE VERY LANGUAGE OF THESE VERSUS ANSWER THE QUESTION. FOR EXAMPLE, THE WORLD IN VERSE 19 CAN BY NO STRETCH OF EXEGETICAL MAGIC BE MADE TO REPRESENT THE ELECT AND NOT THE WHOLE WORLD. THROUGHOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT THE EXTENT OF CHRIST'S ATONEMENT IS SAID TO ENGULF THE WHOLE WORLD AT THE ONLY LIMIT TO THE ATONEMENT IS THE SELF WILL OF THE SINNER! THE FACT THAT THE GOSPEL IS OFFERED TO THE WHOLE WORLD IS SUFFICIENT GROUNDS TO BELIEVE THAT PARDON AND FORGIVENESS COULD AND WOULD BE BASED UPON THOSE THAT ACCEPT THE PROVISION. IT WOULD NOT MAKE SENSE TO HAVE AN OFFER MADE, BUT IN ACTUALITY PROVISION MADE ONLY FOR THE ELECT. THE FACT THAT MEN ARE PUNISHED FOR REFUSING TO RECEIVE THE GOSPEL PROVES THAT THE OFFER TO ALL MEN OF SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST IS A GENUINE OFFER. MEN CANNOT REJECT WHAT DOES NOT EXIST. WITHOUT DELABORING THE TEXT TOO MUCH, THERE IS AN INTERESTING

Jn. 3:16
Isa 53:6
Ezek. 2:9
1 Jn 2:1-2

PLAY ON WORDS TO SHOW THE EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT AND THE EFFICACY OF IT. THE WORD FOR IN VERSE 21 IS THE GREEK PREPOSITION HUPER. IT IS USED THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE AND IS TRANSLATED IN BEHALF OF AND MEANS IN BEHALF OF ALL MEN. WHEN CHRIST DIED ON THE CROSS HE DIED IN BEHALF OF ALL OR THE WHOLE WORLD. HOWEVER, THE EFFICACY OF THE ATONEMENT IS "IN THE STEAD OF" THOSE WHO BELIEVE. IN OTHER WORDS, IT IS EFFECTIVE ONLY TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE. WHEN THIS IDEA IS PRESENTED IN SCRIPTURE IT IS WITH ANOTHER WORD ALSO TRANSLATED FOR BUT, THE GREEK IS ANTI." THIS IS A TECHNICAL DISTINCTION BUT, AN IMPORTANT THEOLOGICAL ONE. THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTIANITY AND THE CHURCH IS INTERPRETED BY DIFFERENT MEN IN DIFFERENT WAYS. (1) TO SOME, CHRISTIANITY MEANS SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BETTERMENT FOR THE PEOPLES OF THE WORLD INVOLVING BETTER JOBS, HOMES, EDUCATION WITH REFERENCE TO HUMANITARIANISM AND THE BETTERMENT OF THE SOCIAL FABRIC OF SOCIETY. (2) FOR OTHERS, THE GOSPEL IS GOD'S GOOD NEWS TO DEAL MAN'S BASIC PROBLEM, NAMELY, SIN. (3) IF MAN GREATEST NEED IS SPIRITUAL AND NOT SOCIAL IN NATURE THEN THE DEATH OF CHRIST IS AT THE CENTER OF WHAT WE BELIEVE AND PREACH. IT WAS SPURGEON WHO SAID THAT ALL SERMONS ARE ALIKE, THEY BEGIN AT A SPECIFIED TEXT AND HEAD FOR THE CROSS! CHRIST'S DEATH FOR US IS SEEN IN THE TERMS OF SUBSTITUTION. LIKE THE ANIMALS IN OLD TESTAMENT SACRIFICES, JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF TOOK OUR PLACE ON THE CROSS TO DIE FOR US. ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE HIS DEATH BRINGS FORGIVENESS OF SINS AND APART FROM THAT DEATH THERE IS NO FORGIVENESS. "WHO GAVE HIMSELF FOR OUR SINS THAT HE MIGHT DELIVER US FROM THIS PRESENT EVIL WORLD ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD AND OUR FATHER." (GALATIANS 1:4). JAMES STEWART REMINDS US THAT ALL HUMAN EFFORT IN REDEMPTION ENDS AT THE SAME PLACE THE TOWER OF BABAL. MAN'S RESOURCES DIRECTED IN GETTING NEAR TO GOD ALWAYS REFLECT IN A BUILDING OR A MONUMENT THAT ENDS IN SHAME AND CONFUSION. HE FURTHER STATES THAT A DROWNING MAN DOES NOT WANT A LECTURE ON THE ART OF SWIMMING, HE WANTS

(Mk. 20:28)

A ROPE TO CLING TO. NOR DOES A LAME MAN ASK FOR A GUIDEPOST TO POINT HIM OUT OF THE WAY, HE ASKS FOR AN ARM TO LEAN ON. IN PILGRIMS PROGRESS BUNYON TELLS LOST HIS BURDEN. THE HIGHWAY WHICH CHRISTIAN WAS TRAVELING WAS FENCED ON BOTH SIDES WITH A WALL AND THAT WALL WAS CALLED SALVATION. AS CHRISTIAN PROCEEDED ALONG THE WAY THE MORE DIFFICULTY HIS BURDEN BECAME, THAT IS THE BURDEN HE CARRIED ON HIS BACK. HE RAN UNTIL HE CAME TO A PLACE WHERE THE ROAD WENT STEEPLY UPWARD AND AT THE TOP OF THAT PLACE STOOD A CROSS AND AT THE BOTTOM A SEPULCHRE. WHEN CHRISTIAN CAME TO THE CROSS, HIS BURDEN LOOSED FROM HIS SHOULDERS AND FELL OFF HIS BACK AND BEGAN TO TUMBLE DOWN THE HILL UNTIL IT CAME TO THE MOUNTAIN OF THE SEPULCHRE FELL IN AND WAS SEEN NO MORE. THIS WAS BUNYON'S WAY OF SHOWING THE EFFECT OF THE CROSS IN RELEASING THE BURDEN OF SIN. I PETER 3:18 SAYS: "FOR CHRIST ALSO HATH ONCE SUFFERED FOR SINS, THE JUST FOR THE UNJUST, THAT HE MIGHT BRING US TO GOD, BEING PUT TO DEATH IN THE FLESH, BUT QUICKENED BY THE SPIRIT". ACCORDING TO THIS VERSE

(1) JESUS WAS THE JUST WE THE UNJUST
(2) THE PURPOSE OF HIS DEATH WAS TO BRING US TO GOD. THEREFORE, WE MUST HAVE BEEN AWAY FROM GOD AND THERE MUST HAVE BEEN NO OTHER WAY TO BRING US TO GOD!

III. HE MIGHT SAY THERE IS A BETTER LIFE AVAILABLE - VERSE 17

THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING THIS VERSE IS THE PHRASE "IN CHRIST". THIS FAVORITE EXPRESSION OF PAUL'S IS USED SOME 164 TIMES IN HIS EPISTLES IT IS A TECHNICAL TERM USED TO DESCRIBE THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE BELIEVER TO CHRIST. IT DESCRIBES A SPIRITUAL AND NOT A PHYSICAL RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST. ACCORDING TO THIS VERSE THE PERSON WHO IS IN CHRIST IS A NEW PERSON ALTOGETHER IN THE SPIRITUAL SENSE. HIS PAST LIFE,

HIS GOALS, METHODS AND ASPIRATIONS ARE GONE. EVERYTHING HAS BECOME FRESH AND NEW. THE WORD "PASSED AWAY" IS IN A PARTICULAR TENSE WHICH SUGGESTS THAT ALL THINGS IN THE OLD LIFE ARE GONE. THEY ARE SAID TO BECOME "NEW". THIS SUGGESTS A NEWNESS WHICH REMAINS CONSTANTLY NEW. IF SOMEONE SHOULD ASK OR INQUIRE CONCERNING THE WAY YOU ARE LIVING, COULD YOU SAY IN THE TERMS OF THE BIBLE THAT YOURS IS AN ABUNDANT AND FULL SPIRITUAL LIFE? ARE YOU CONFIDENT AND SECURE IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD? JESUS SAID "I AM COME THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE LIFE AND THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE IT MORE ABUNDANTLY." (JOHN 10:10). IF YOUR LIFE IS NOT ABUNDANT AND FULL, THEN IT MAY BE BECAUSE YOU'RE NOT "IN CHRIST." * (RELATE ILLUSTRATION OF AUTOMOBILE WASHED AND POLISHED. NO RUST BUT WHEN SOMEONE LOOKED UNDER THE HOOD THERE WAS NO ENGINE! RELIGION WORKS ON THE EXTERNALS, WASHING POLISHING RELIGION. CHRIST DEALS WITH THE HEART OR THE ENGINE WHEN HE TOUCHES THE LIFE.) THE PHRASE "IN CHRIST" IS ANOTHER WAY OF DESCRIBING NEW BIRTH, BORN AGAIN, CONVERSION, REGENERATION, SAVED. THIS OFTEN REPEATED VERSE SAYS ONE THING ABOVE ALL ELSE - CHANGE. THERE ARE SOME TRUTHS WHICH WE LEARN IN AN ACADEMIC SETTING. TO BE SURE, WITH PREACHERS MUCH OF WHAT WE ARE TOLD IN THE EARLY DAYS IS LEARNED IN THE SEMINARY CLASS ROOM. THE TRUTH OF THIS VERSE IS TO ME MORE THAN ACADEMIC IN NATURE, IT IS REAL, PRACTICAL, VITAL. THE OLD THINGS OF WHICH PAUL SPOKE IN OUR FAMILY HAD TO DO WITH EXPERIENCES SUCH AS (1) TWO 38'S POINTED AT EACH OTHER - AT AGE 6 YEARS IN COAL FIELDS. IT HAD TO DO WITH ONE PARENT KNOCKING THE OTHER DOWN OR SENSELESS, CURSING, AND ALL THE UNPLEASANTRIES THAT A LOVE/HATE RELATIONSHIP BRINGS INTO THE HOME FOR SMALL CHILDREN TO SEE. FOR OUR FAMILY THE OLD THINGS INVOLVED OLD DRINKS SUCH AS LIQUOR, BEER FROM HOME BREW TO MOONSHINE. OLD JOKES, OLD HAUNTS, OLD DESIRES, OLD BOOKS, AND OLD HABITS HAVE DISAPPEARED! WHEN I SPEAK

OF THE GUTTER IT IS NOT FROM AN IVORY TOWER IT IS FROM A MEMORY OF THE VIVID AND FRIGHTENING DAYS OF THE OLD THINGS. THIS WAS BC 1948. THE TERM "NEW" REFERS TO A NEW LIFE, NEW HAUNTS SUCH AS CHURCH, PRAYER MEETING, TESTIMONIES, STREET MEETINGS, PASSING OUT TRACTS, READING THE BIBLE, AND ENJOYING IT! NEW LOVE FOR CHRIST, FAMILY, FELLOW MEN AND A NEW WAY OF LIVING THAT CRIES OUT FROM THE PAGES OF SCRIPTURE "I'VE BEEN SAVED!" ONCE A PERSON HAS BEEN TO CALVARY, THE OLD LIFE HAS NO MEANING WHATSOEVER! THESE TRUTHS ARE SPOKEN NOT FROM ONE WHO HAS LIVED IN AN IVORY TOWER BUT FROM ONE WHO WAS RESCUED FROM THE GUTTER BY THE GRACE OF GOD! THAT NEW LIFE AND NEW BEGINNING IS AVAILABLE FOR ALL WILL RECEIVE CHRIST. TODAY CAN BE YOUR SPIRITUAL BIRTHDAY!

IV. HE WOULD INVITE YOU TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR BAD RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD- VERSE 20-21

THE FACT THAT THE SCRIPTURE ASKS THAT MEN BE RECONCILED TO GOD INDICATES THAT THERE IS AN ESTRANGEMENT, ALIENATION, PROBLEM IN THE RELATIONSHIP AND THAT PROBLEM HAS TO DO WITH SIN AND ITS PENALITY. THE AUTOMATIC REACTION OF THE NATURAL MAN TO SUCH TRUTH IS "I'M NOT SO BAD". WHO SAYS SO? ASK THE PERSON WHO REALLY KNOWS DEEP AND DARK SECRETS OF THE HUMAN HEART - NAMELY GOD HIMSELF! (ROMANS 3:23, ROMANS 3:10, EPHESIANS 2:1,12) "BUT AT THAT TIME YE WERE WITHOUT CHRIST BEING ALIENS FROM THE COMMONWEALTH OF ISRAEL, STRANGERS FROM THE COVANTS OF PROMISE, HAVING NO HOPE, AND WITHOUT GOD IN THE WORLD." YOU AND I WERE BORN WITH OUR BACKS TO GOD, WITH A SPIRITUAL AND MORALE DISEASE CALLED SIN. UNTIL SOMETHING IS DONE ABOUT THAT SPIRITUAL MALADY, IT IS NOT POSSIBLE FOR OUR RELATIONSHIP TO BE CORRECT WITH GOD. THE BIBLE SPEAKS OF A CORRECT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD USING THE TERM RIGHTOUS OR RIGHTOUSNESS.

A TEST TO DETERMINE RELATIONSHIP:
(1) THE BIBLE, IS IT A DELIGHT OR A DILEMMA? IS A TREASURE OR A DUST COLLECTOR? IS IT ON THE NIGHT TABLE, DINNER TABLE COFFEE TABLE OR IS IT SOMEWHERE OUT OF SIGHT AND OUT OF MIND.
(2) THE CHURCH AND CHRISTIANS. DO YOU DELIGHT IN THE PRESENSE OF THE LORD'S PEOPLE, THE PREACHING AND TEACHING OF HIS WORD AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF OTHER BELIEVERS OR ARE THEY SIMPLY TOLERATED FOR A LIMITED ONCE A WEEK?
(3) YOUR FAITH. IS YOUR FAITH SIMPLY A FIRE ESCAPE TO KEEP YOUR OWN SOUL OUT OF HELL OR IS IT SOMETHING YOU DELIGHT IN SHARING WITH OTHER PEOPLE?
(4) THE INVITATION AT CHURCH. IS IT A TIME WHEN YOU PRAY THAT PEOPLE WILL RESPOND AND COME TO KNOW CHRIST AS SAVIOR OR IT IS A TIME OF RESTLESSNESS, ANGER, ANEXIETY AND A DESIRE TO GET OUT OF CHURCH AND DO SOMETHING ELSE?
(5) IF YOU'RE REALLY SAVED YOU'LL LIVE FOR CHRIST, LOVE HIS WORD AND HIMSELF, FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD WILL BE PRIMARY IN THE LIFE, A JOY AND A DELIGHT NOT A BURDEN TO THE SOUL.

V. HE WOULD TELL YOU THAT YOU OUGHT TO BE SAVED NOW - 6:2 (Today)

WE ARE FAR TOO CASUAL ABOUT CHRIST AND CONDEMNATION. FOR MOST PEOPLE TOMORROW, SOMEDAY, BUT NOT TODAY IS THE APPROACH TO THE INVITATION. "WHY NOT NOW"? IS THE THEME OF A HYMN. THE EXCUSES ABOUND; "I'M NOT READY, I'M TOO OLD OR TOO YOUNG, I'M WAITING FOR SOMETHING OR SOMEONE, I WANT TO THINK ABOUT IT A WHILE LONGER, THERE ARE THOUSANDS OF EXCUSES, BUT NONE WILL SUCCESSFULLY STIFFLE THE VOICE OF GOD IN THE SOUL WHICH SAYS NOW - DON'T WAIT.

ROBERT K. SPRADLING FEBRUARY 28, 1982

"THE MINISTER'S LABOR UNION: W.I.W.H."

II CORINTHIANS 6:1-13

A RESTAURANT OWNER IN CALIFORNIA, KEPT HIS MEMBERSHIP IN THE WAITERS UNION AS A REMINDER OF HOW AND WHERE HE STARTED. THE UNION WENT ON STRIKE, AND THE OWNER RECEIVED A NOTICE TO REPORT FOR PICKET DUTY AT HIS OWN RESTAURANT OR FACE A FINE! WE HEAR WORDS LIKE SOLIDARITY, TEAMSTERS, A.F.L.-C.I.O. U.A.W. AND IN OUR OWN AREA U.M.W.A. MY EYE AND MIND IS ALWAYS CONFUSED WHEN I READ IN THE NEWSPAPER A HEADLINE SAYING: "CHURCH LEADS UMWA IN STRIKE." I ALWAYS THINK THAT SOME KIND OF ECCLESIASTICAL UNION! OUR TEXT TODAY, INTRODUCES US TO PAUL'S LABOR UNION! THERE IS A SENSE IN WHICH ALL CHRISTIAN WORKERS BELONG TO THAT UNION. THE LIST OF MEMBERS IS QUITE IMPRESSIVE

(1) PRISCILLA AND AQUILA - ROMANS 13:3,
(2) URBANE - ROMANS 16:9
(3) TIMOTHY - ROMANS 16:21
(4) DEMAS & LUCAS - PHILEMON 24
(5) EPAPHRODITUS - PHILIPPIANS 2:25

ONE GETS THE DISTINCT IMPRESSION THAT PAUL BELIEVED IN HARD AND FAITHFUL CONSCIENTIOUS (1) WORK AND THAT SWEAT WAS THE PRICE OF ALL THINGS. IN OUR TIME, THAT PHILOSOPHY HAS CHANGED WITH MANY WHO BELIEVE THAT (2) KNOWING THE RIGHT PEOPLE AND HAVING THE RIGHT INFLUENCE OR MAKING USE OF OTHER PEOPLE IS THE WAY TOWARD ONE'S OWN ADVANCEMENT. PAUL LOOKED UPON THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO BE A CO-WORKER OR ONE WHO WORKED TOGETHER OR JOINTLY WITH GOD. THE PHRASE "WORKERS TOGETHER" IS A COMPOUND GREEK WORD THE ROOT OF WHICH IS ERGON FROM WHICH WE GET OUR WORD ENERGY. THE PREPOSITION SUN IS TRANSLATED THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE

"WITH" AND IS A PREPOSITION MARKING SPECIAL RELATIONSHIPS. THERE IS SOMETHING VERY SPECIAL ABOUT THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY AND THOSE WHO ARE PRIVILEGED TO SHARE IN IT WITH GOD. "FOR WE ARE LABORERS TOGETHER WITH GOD,..." (I CORINTHIANS 3:9 - SAME WORD AS HERE). BY THE WAY, THESE WORDS ARE TRANSLATED SIMILARLY IN ROMANS 8:28! A. T. ROBERTSON REMINDS HIS READERS THAT WHEN ONE IS A CO-WORKER WITH GOD INTERESTING AND UNUSUAL THINGS HAPPEN. (COMPARE SISERA AND THE COURSES OF NATURE FIGHTING AGAINST EVIL MEN FOR THE CAUSE OF ISRAEL. "THE STARS IN THEIR COURSES FAUGHT AGAINST SISERA," (JUDGES 5:20)

I. WORKING WITH GOD REQUIRES PERSONAL INTEGRITY ON THE PART OF THE WORKER - VERSES 3-4A, VERSES 7-3

ACCORDING TO VERSE 3, PAUL WAS CONCERNED THAT NOTHING DISCREDIT THE GOSPEL MINISTRY. THE WORD OFFENSE SUGGESTS THAT PAUL WANTED NOTHING TO BE A STUMBLING BLOCK OR OBSTACLE TO THE GOSPEL MINISTRY. THIS WORD MEANS MORE THAN HURTING SOMEONE'S FEELINGS. AS A MATTER OF FACT, IT IS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO PREACH AND TEACH THE WORD OF GOD AND NOT HURT SOMEONE'S FEELINGS! DR. IRONSIDE HAS A CUTE STORY IN HIS COMMENTARY AS HE TALKS ABOUT SENSITIVE FEELINGS. HE SUGGESTS THAT IF YOU SHAKE HANDS WITH SOME FOLK IT WILL BE TO HARD AND HURT THEIR RHEUMATISM. IF YOU SPEAK TO THEM WHILE THEY'RE TALKING TO SOMEONE ELSE YOU'RE INTERRUPTING, IF YOU DO NOT YOU'RE IGNORING THEM. IF YOU VISIT YOU'RE BOTHERING THEM, IF YOU DON'T YOU'RE SHOWING NO INTEREST IN OTHER PEOPLE. THEREFORE, THE TERM MEANS NOT CAUSING OTHER PEOPLE TO STUMBLE BY VIRTUE OF OUR INCONSISTENT CHRISTIAN CONDUCT. THE WORD BLAMED SUGGESTS A BLOT OR BLEMISH WHICH MIGHT CLOSE THE HEARTS OF MEN TO THE APPEAL OF THE GOSPEL. EVERY

PERSON CAN THINK OF SITUATIONS IN WHICH PERSONAL AND MORAL HONESTY, SOUNDNESS AND UPRIGHTNESS WERE BROUGHT INTO QUESTION. PAUL WANTED NOTHING HE MIGHT DO TO HURT OR DAMAGE IN ANY WAY TO THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL AND THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY. (IN ROMANS 14 WHICH IS A CHAPTER ON ETHICAL PRINCIPALS FOR BELIEVERS VERSE 13 SAYS "LET US NOT THEREFORE JUDGE ONE ANOTHER ANY MORE: JUDGE THIS RATHER, THAT NO MAN PUT A STUMBLING BLOCK OR AN OCCASION TO FALL IN HIS BROTHER'S WAY.") ACCORDING TO VERSE 4, THE CHRISTIAN MINISTER IS TO PROVE HIMSELFE A GENUINE SERVANT CALLED TO THE WORK BY GOD. VERSES 6-8 LISTS SOME TERMS WHICH SPEAK TO THE INTEGRITY OF THE CHRISTIAN WORKER.

(1) PURENESS - A REFERENCE TO A WHOLESOME, CLEAN MORAL LIFE WITH NO CLOUDS OF IMMORALITY IN THE SKY AT ALL! (no picture with Rafer)

(2) KNOWLEDGE - THE MINISTRY IS NO PLACE TO VERBALIZE OUR DOUBTS, GUESSES AND MAYBES. PAUL KNEW SOME THINGS FOR SURE AND SO SHOULD WE!

(3) LONGSUFFERING - NOT A PERSON WITH A SHORT FUSE OR BAD TEMPER.

(4) KINDNESS - A TENDER AND LOVING DISPOSITION TOWARD OTHERS.

(5) HOLY SPIRIT - A SPIRIT CONTROLLED LIFE.

(6) LOVE UNFEIGNED - NO PRETENSE OR ACTING BUT A REAL AND GENUINE HEART OF LOVE.

(7) WORD OF TRUTH - A PERSON WHO KNOWS HIS BIBLE. IT IS A SIMPLE FACT THAT ONE CANNOT SHARE WITH OTHERS WHAT HE HIMSELF DOES NOT KNOW AND HAVE. "THE PHRASE ARMOUR OF RIGHTEOUSNESS" IS TRANSLATED AS FOLLOWS IN PHILLIPS TRANSLATION. "OUR SOLE DEFENSE, OUR ONLY WEAPON IS A LIFE OF INTEGRITY,..." (WHEN ONE THINKS OF INTEGRITY THE STORY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN WHEN HE SERVED AS POSTMASTER OF NEW SALEM, IL COMES TO MIND. HIS ANNUAL SALARY WAS $55.70. HE WAS CALLED HONEST ABE." THE NEW SALEM POSTOFFICE WAS

CLOSED IN 1836 BUT IT WAS SEVERAL YEARS BEFORE AN AGENT FROM WASHINGTON ARRIVED TO SETTLE ACCOUNTS WITH EX-POSTMASTER LINCOLN WHO WAS A STRUGGLING YOUNG LAWYER. THE AGENT INFORMED HIM THAT THERE WAS $17.00 DUE THE GOVERNMENT AT WHICH TIME LINCOLN CROSSED THE ROOM OPENED AN OLD TRUNK TOOK OUT A YELLOW COTTON BOUND WITH STRING AND SPREAD OUT THE EXACT AMOUNT - $17.00 -BEFORE THE AGENT. HE HAD KEPT THESE FUNDS IN RESERVE FOR THAT VERY PURPOSE. THERE ARE OTHER STORIES ABOUT HOW LINCOLN WALKED LONG DISTANCES TO REFUND A FEW CENTS OF OVERCHARGE. CHARLES LINDBERG STEADFASTLY REFUSED TO CAPITALIZE ON HIS FAME FOR COMMERCIAL PURPOSES. AFTER BEING INUNDATED WITH REQUESTS TO WRITE BOOKS, STAR IN FILMS, STAGE, AND ALL KINDS OF ENDORSEMENT OFFERS, A FRIEND OF LINDBERG SAID SIMPLY: "HE WON'T TAKE MONEY HE HASN'T EARNED." WE ALL REMEMBER THE STORY OF HENRY CLAY WHO WAS ABOUT TO INTRODUCE A CERTAIN BILL IN CONGRESS WHEN A FRIEND SAID, "IF YOU DO, CLAY, IT WILL KILL YOUR CHANCE FOR THE PRESIDENCY." CLAY'S CLASSIC ANSWER WAS: "I WOULD RATHER BE RIGHT THAN BE PRESIDENT." (I HAVE OFTEN WONDERED IF INTEGRITY WAS NOT UPPERMOST IN PAUL'S MIND WHEN HE LISTED THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR A BISHOP OR ELDER. THAT PARTICULAR OFFICE IN A CHURCH REQUIRES CHARACTER THAT BOTH INSPIRES CONFIDENCE AND COMMANDS RESPECT. WHEN THE BISHOP IS SAID TO BE "THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE" PAUL IS STRESSING A HIGH STANDARD IN THE MARITIAL RELATIONSHIP, IN OTHER WORDS FAITHFULNESS TO A SINGLE MARRIAGE PARTNER FOR LIFE A LARGE STEP TOWARD MORAL INTEGRITY!

II. WORKING WITH GOD SUBJECTS THE WORKER TO THE RIGORS OF ADVERSITY - VERSES 4-5

PAUL WAS A MAN WHO HAD PATIENTLY ENDURED SUFFERING HARDSHIP AND TROUBLE OF EVERY KIND. PAUL WAS

A SEASONED SOLDIER OF THE CROSS, HE HAD BEEN TO THE WARS IN CONFLICT FOR CHRIST AND HAD BORNE THE HARDSHIPS OF COMBAT. TO THE GALATIANS HE SAID: "I BEAR IN MY BODY THE MARKS OF LORD JESUS". (GALATIANS 6:17) PAUL'S DIARY OR MISSIONARY LOG REVEALED A WIDE RANGE OF HUMAN EXPERIENCES NOT THE LEAST OF WHICH WERE BEATINGS AND IMPRISONMENT. (ACTS 16:23, II CORINTHIANS 11:23). WHEN WE THINK OF ADVERSITY IT INVOLVES SUCH THINGS AS A TV ON THE BLINK, MISSING A TURN IN THE REVOLVING DOOR, COLD TOAST, EGGS, OATMEAL OR COFFEE. FOR PAUL FOODLESS DAYS AND SLEEPLESS NIGHTS WERE NOT JUST THE PROBLEMS OF INDIGESTION AND INSOMNIA BUT RATHER WILLING HARDSHIPS HE BORE FOR THE SAKE OF TAKING THE GOSPEL TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH FOR THE GLORY OF JESUS CHRIST.

III. WORKING WITH GOD DEMANDS AN OPENNESS IN HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS - VERSES 11-13

"OOH, DEAR FRIENDS IN CORINTH, WE ARE HIDING NOTHING FROM YOU AND OUR HEARTS ARE ABSOLUTELY OPEN TO YOU." (PHILLIPS TRANSLATION - VERSE 11) WE USE THE TERM OPEN RATHER FREELY IN REFERENCE TO AN OPEN SOCIETY, EYES, MIND, HAND, EARS, DOORS, AND MOUTH! PAUL IS ENCOURAGING THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH NOT TO PLAY GAMES WITH HIM, TO HAVE NO HIDDEN MOTIVES OR IDEAS IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP - BE CANDID AND OPEN. IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE CANDID AND CHARMING WITHOUT BEING COURSE AND CAUSTIC AND CRITICAL. SOMETIMES PEOPLE BUILD FENCES, BARRIERS AND DEFENSES AROUND THEMSELVES WHICH SAY **STAY OUT**! PAUL IS SAYING THAT AS FAR AS HE WAS CONCERNED THE DOOR OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP WAS OPEN AND HE INVITED THEM TO COME IN AND TALK. PAUL TEACHES A VALUABLE LESSON IN THAT THERE IS SOMETHING TERRIBLY DISARMING ABOUT HONESTY AND CANDOR. WE EXPECT FOLK TO BE EVASIVE AND DECEPTIVE IN CERTAIN AREAS AND ARE CAUGHT

OFF GUARD WHEN THEY ARE NOT! (IN ONE OF HIS BOOKS, BARCLAY DESCRIBES A PSYCHIATRIST WORK AS SIMPLY STRIPPING A PERSON NAKED OF ALL EXTERNAL TRAPPINGS UNTIL ONE GETS DOWN TO THE ESSENTIAL MAN WHAT HE IS REALLY MADE OUT OF AND THERE IS NOTHING THE COUNSELOR CAN DO ABOUT THAT BASIC STUFF!) TOO BE SURE, SOME OF US ARE LEARY AND AFRAID OF PEOPLE WHO ARE OPEN IN THEIR RELATIONSHIPS. THE CORINTHIANS NEEDED TO LEARN HOW TO LIVE THAT WAY. PAUL SPOKE OF AN OPEN MOUTH AND ENLARGED HEART.

IV. WORKING WITH GOD PROMOTES A SENSE OF DIVINE URGENCY - VERSE 2

IF YOU AND I HAD NO BIBLE, WE WOULD NEVER GET VERY EXCITED ABOUT THE LOST CONDITION OF THE MAN OUTSIDE OF CHRIST. THE PHILOSOPHY WOULD BE BASICLY OF LIVE AND LET LIVE, LET FOLK ALONE TO DO THE BEST THEY CAN OR THE BEST THEY KNOW HOW. HOWEVER, WHEN ONE IS EXPOSED TO THE BIBLE THE URGENCY OF KNOWING CHRIST IS PARAMOUNT. THE LITTLE WORD NOW WHICH APPEARS TWICE IN OUR TEXT IS USED ELSEWHERE IN A VERY INTERESTING FASHION. (LUKE 16:25). ABRAHAM'S EMPHASIS ON THE TERM NOW RINGS THROUGH THE PAGES OF HOLY SCRIPTURE. THERE IS A THEOLOGICAL URGENCY COMING FROM THE PAGES OF THE BIBLE IMPRESSING MEN WITH THE FACT THAT WE LIVE IN GOD'S TIME NOW. EVERY THING IS FAVORABLE FOR YOUR SALVATION. THERE IS NO PROMISE OF A FUTURE DAY IT IS ALWAYS NOW. (RELATE TO SURGERY IN 1974. SOMETIME WAS REQUIRED TO DIAGNOSE CONDITION, BUT WHEN THE NATURE OF THE ILLNESS WAS KNOWN WAITING COULD HAVE BEEN FATAL.)

ROBERT K. SPRADLING

MARCH 7, 1982
A.M.

"THE SENSITIVE SUBJECT OF SEPARATION"
II CORINTHIANS 6:14-7:1

IF A PERSON MUST APPEAL TO THE CHURCH ROLL TO VERIFY OR VALIDATE HIS CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE, SOMETHING IS WRONG. FOR GENUINE CONVERSION SHOULD BE READILY OBSERVABLE. IT'S LIKE PHONING THE WEATHER BUREAU TO SEE IF THE SUN IS SHINING! ACCORDING TO II CORINTHIANS 5:17, GENUINE CONVERSION RESULTS IN CHANGE IN THE LIFE. HOWEVER, IN CORINTH IT WAS DIFFICULT AT TIMES TO TELL THE CHRISTIANS FROM THE PAGANS BY THEIR CONVERSATION AND CONDUCT. ONE PURPOSE OF CONVERSION IS TO SEPARATE THE SINNER FROM EVIL. A HALF-HEARTED FAITH WITH ITS ROOTS IN THE BIBLE, BUT ITS BRANCHES AND FRUIT IN THE WORLD IS A PURPOSELESS AND USELESS KIND OF FAITH! THE IDEA OF SEEING HOW LITTLE ONE MAY DO AND STILL GET TO HEAVEN MISSES THE WHOLE PURPOSE OF THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE. SOME PROFESSING CHRISTIANS WANT TO BELIEVE IN JESUS, THAT IS POSESS HIM, BUT THEY DO NOT WANT TO BE POSSESSED BY HIM. IN OTHER WORDS, THEY WANT TO OWN HIM BUT NOT BE OWNED BY HIM. LOT LEARNED THAT THE WORLD WILL DRAG TO ITS LEVEL, ONE CANNOT ESCAPE ITS CORRUPTION WHILE IMBIBING OF ITS PHILOSOPHY. HEALTH IS NOT CONTAGIOUS, SICKNESS IS! SIN IS EASY TO CATCH BUT GODLINESS IS DIFFICULT TO SUSTAIN. WHEN LOT SAUGHT EMPLOYMENT IN SODOM AND BOUGHT REALESTATE THERE HE NOT ONLY MOVED INTO SODOM, BUT SODOM MOVED INTO HIM AND FROM THAT DAY ON HE BEGAN TO LOOSE EVERYTHING WORTH WHILE IN LIFE, NAMELY, FAMILY, FRIENDS, FAME AND FORTUNE - IT ALL DISAPPEARED! QUESTION: WHY WOULD A PERSON WANT TO PROFESS TO BE A CHRISTIAN AND THEN ATTEMPT TO LIVE IN THE WORLD ACCORDING TO THE WORLD'S PHILOSOPHY AND PRINCIPLES?

(MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THIS IDEA WAS SHORTLY AFTER BEING SAVED AND CHARLIE BREWER'S ATTEMPT TO RETURN TO THE TAVERN WITH ITS INDULGENCES IN ORDER TO "WITNESS TO THEM." IT WAS MY CONVICTION THAT HE WAS MORE INTERESTED IN HIS FLESHLY APPETITE THAN HIS SUPPOSED NEW FOUND FAITH. IT SEEMS TO ME, THAT BELIEVERS SHOULD BE CONCERNED ABOUT BIBLICAL INJUNCTIONS AND THE BELIEVERS RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORLD.) IN THE VERSES OF THE TEXT, PAUL RELATES TO THE CORINTHIANS THE TWO SIDES OF A BIBLICAL COIN:

(1) SEPARATION FROM EVIL
(2) CONSECRATION TO THE LORD.

I. BE YE NOT UNEQUALLY YOKED TOGETHER WITH UNBELIEVERS - VERSE 14

THE WORDS "BE YE NOT" LITERALLY MEAN STOP BEING. (RELATE TO TELEVISION PROGRAM. THE DIRECTOR DID NOT SAY (1) YOUR TIME HAS ELAPSED (2) DON'T YOU THINK YOU OUGHT TO CLOSE (3) WOULDN'T YOU LIKE TO TERMINATE YOUR MESSAGE SOON. THE SIGN SAID SIMPLY "GET OUT!" THE WORD "UNEQUALLY" APPEARS HERE ONLY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND IS THE WORD "HETRO" AND MEANS DIFFERENCE IN KIND OR ANOTHER KIND. THE TERM YOKE LITERALLY REFERRED TO A PIECE OF CURVED TIMBER FITTED WITH A BOW AROUND AN ANIMAL'S NECK FOR THE PURPOSE OF SUBMISSION TO WORK OR SERVICE. (RELATE TO HOME PLACE). A YOKE ALSO BECAME THE SYMBOL OF SLAVERY AND SUBMISSION. ITS VERY NATURE OR CONSTRUCTION NECESSITATES HARNESSING TWO ANIMALS SIDE BY SIDE PULLING IN THE SAME DIRECTION. ACCORDING TO DEUTERONOMY 22:9-10 TWO ANIMALS THAT WERE DIFFERENT AS FAR AS THE CEREMONIAL LAW, THAT IS CLEAN AND UNCLEAN, COULD NOT BE YOKED TOGETHER. SIMPLY STATED, PAUL WAS

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SAYING THAT YOKE SITUATIONS, THAT IS INTIMATE SITUATIONS WHERE PRINCIPLE IS REQUIRED IN ORDER TO PULL TOGETHER, IN SUCH SITUATIONS THE BELIEVER SHOULD EXERCISE EXTREME CARE ABOUT HIS "PULLING PARTNER." PAUL MENTIONS FIVE WHATS IN THE VERSES

(1) WHAT FELLOWSHIP - RIGHTEOUSNESS AND UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. THE WORD FELLOWSHIP REFERS TO SHARING AND THE WORD UNRIGHTEOUSNESS SHOULD BE TRANSLATED LAWLESSNESS FOR IT IS THE GREEK WORK ANOMIA. WHAT GROUND OF SHARING OR COMMON GROUND DOES RIGHTEOUSNESS AND UNRIGHTEOUSNESS HAVE? THE ANSWER - NONE.

(2) WHAT COMMUNION - LIGHT AND DARKNESS? THE TERM COMMUNION HERE IS THE COMMON WORD FOR FELLOWSHIP OR KOINONIA. THE ANSWER - NONE.

(3) WHAT CONCORD - CHRIST AND BELIAL? THE WORD CONCORD IS THE GREEK WORD FOR SYMPHONY AND THE WORD BELIAL IS A TERM USED TO DESIGNATE THE PERSONIFICATION OF EVIL OR SATAN. SIMPLY STATED, THE DEVIL AND THE LORD DON'T PLAY IN THE SAME SYMPHONY OR THE SAME MUSIC!

(4) WHAT PART THE BELIEVER AND INFIDEL OR UNBELIEVER? THE WORD FOR PART IS PORTION AND THE ANSWER IS NONE.

(5) WHAT AGREEMENT - THE TEMPLE OF GOD AND IDOLS? THE TERM AGREEMENT IS THE WORD UNION AND SUGGESTS AGREEMENT BY VOTING. THE PURPOSE OF THE HOUSE OF GOD AND THE HOUSE OF IDOLS IS NOT THE SAME. THESE FIVE CONTRASTS ARE WAYS OF SAYING THAT CERTAIN THINGS DO NOT GO TOGETHER IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE. THE BELIEVER DARE NOT "YOKE" HIMSELF IN CERTAIN CLOSE AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS IN LIFE WHERE SPIRITUAL PHILOSOPHY AND INTERESTS ARE AT STAKE. ONE OBVIOUS AREA OF SENSITIVITY IS MARRIAGE. (STATE A SITUATION WHERE A YOUNG LADY WANTS TO GET MARRIED AND DESCRIBES ALL OF THE PHYSICAL AND COURTEOUS QUALITIES OF THE GROOM TO BE. HIS SPIRITUAL STATUS CONSIDERED INSIGNIFICANT FOR SHE WILL CHANGE HIM AFTER MARRIAGE. WRONG! PRIOR TO MARRIAGE

IS THE TIME OF MAXIMUM INFLUENCE AND IF THE SPIRITUAL MATTER HAS NOT BEEN SETTLED THEN IT IS UNLIKELY TO BE SETTLED, THE GAP OR BREECH WILL SIMPLY BECOME WIDER AND THE CONFLICT GREATER. THE REASON IS THEIR DIRECTIONS ARE OPPOSITE. IF IT WERE POSSIBLE FOR A PERSON TO GET ON A PLANE AND GO TO THE EAST AND WEST COAST AT THE SAME TIME THEN IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE FOR A BELIEVER AND AN UNBELIEVER TO BE MARRIED SUCCESSFULLY. F. B. MEYER HAS WELL SAID: "YOU MAY SUPPOSE THAT BY MARRYING THE UNGODLY AND THE IRRELIGIOUS YOU'LL BE ABLE TO CONVERT THEM TO YOUR WAY OF THINKING, BUT YOU MUST REMEMBER THAT REGENERATION IS THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND HE IS NOT LIKELY TO LEND HIS AID WHILE YOU ARE ACTING IN DEFIANCE OF HIS DISTINCT PROHIBITIONS." ANOTHER AREA OF SENSITIVITY (2) IS IN THE SOCIAL WORLD. THERE IS A TENDENCY ON THE PART OF SOME PROFESSING CHRISTIANS TO BOAST OF THE NEARNESS WITH WHICH THEY CAN APPROACH THE WORLD WITHOUT INJURY OR DAMAGE. THE IDEA OF WALKING NEAR THE EDGE WITHOUT FALLING OVER IS AT LEAST A DANGEROUS WAY OF THINKING. DR. IRONSIDE TELLS OF A YOUNG CHRISTIAN WOMAN WHO WENT AWAY TO COLLEGE AND WAS PERSUADED BY NOMINAL CHRISTIANS THAT IT WOULD BE ALRIGHT TO GO TO A CERTAIN SOCIAL EVEN THOUGH EVERYONE KNEW THERE WOULD BE DRINKING AND SOME MATTERS OF DISTASTE FOR A PROFESSING CHRISTIAN. THE YOUNG LADY TRYING TO JUSTIFY HER PRESENCE AT THE PARTY SOUGHT TO SHARE HER FAITH WITH A MALE COMPANION AND ASKED HIM IF HE WAS A CHRISTIAN? HE LOOKED AT HER AND SAID: "GRACIOUS NO, ARE YOU? OH YES, WAS HER REPLY AND HIS FINAL RETORT: "WELL WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU DOING HERE, THEN?" THE YOUNG LADY REALIZED THAT IN SOME INSTANCES THE WORLD HAS A HIGHER STANDING FOR A CHRISTIAN, THAT IS THE WORLD

EXPECTS A CHRISTIAN TO WALK A LIFE OF SEPARATION AND HIGH STANDARD AND SOMETIMES THAT STANDARD IS HIGHER THAN THE CHRISTIAN HIMSELF BELIEVES IN. IN THE ANCIENT WORLD, MANY HEATHEN FEASTS WERE HELD IN THE TEMPLE OF A CERTAIN GOD. AN INVITATION MIGHT BE SENT FOR PEOPLE TO JOIN IN THAT FESTIVE OCCASION. THE BEGINNING OF THE FESTIVE EVENING WAS WITH THE POURING OUT OF THE LIBATION OR CUP OF WINE TO THE GODS. COULD A CHRISTIAN ATTEND SUCH A MEETING AND SHARE IN SUCH SACRILEGE? OR, AS A CHRISTIAN MUST HE SAY GOOD-BY TO SUCH SOCIAL OCCASIONS WHICH HAD HAD LITTLE OR NO MEANING TO HIM PREVIOUSLY. IT WAS DIFFICULT AT CORINTH AS IT IS IN CHARLESTON FOR SOME BELIEVERS TO REALIZE THAT WHEN A PERSON BECOMES A CHRISTIAN THERE ARE CERTAIN THINGS HE CANNOT DO AND STILL MAINTAIN HIS CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY AND CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY! ANOTHER RELM OF WHICH THE YOKE MIGHT BE APPLIED IS THE BUSINESS WORLD. FOR EXAMPLE IF AT CORINTH LET US SUPPOSE A MAN WAS A STONE MASON. WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF HE RECEIVED A CONTRACT TO BUILD A HEATHEN SHRINE. SUPPOSE A MAN WERE A TAILOR AND WAS INSTRUCTED TO MAKE PRIEST'S GARMENTS OR OTHER VESTURE GARMENTS TO BE USED IN THE SACRIFICES OF HEATHEN GODS? IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE CHURCH, REPEATEDLY CHRISTIANS WERE REQUIRED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN SPIRITUALITY AND JOB SECURITY. BARCLAY TELLS THE STORY OF A MAN WHO LIVED IN ENGLAND MANY YEARS AGO BY THE NAME OF CHARRINGTON. HE HAD MADE A FORTUNE IN THE BREWING INDUSTRY. ONE NIGHT WHILE WALKING PAST THE TAVERN HE SAW A WOMAN WAITING AT THE DOOR. A MAN, OBVIOUSLY HER HUSBAND CAME OUT AND SHE WAS TRYING TO KEEP HIM FROM GOING BACK IN. WITH ONE BLOW OF HIS FIST THE MAN KNOCKED HIS WIFE TO THE STREET CHARRINGTON MOVED FORWARD TO HELP THE LADY AND AT THE SAME TIME LOOKED UP TO NOTICE

THAT THE TAVERN BORE HIS NAME. HE LATER REMARKED THAT WITH ONE BLOW THAT MAN HAD NOT ONLY KNOCKED HIS WIFE OUT, BUT HE HAD KNOCKED CHARRINGTON OUT OF THE BREWERY BUSINESS. HE SOLD HIS INTERESTS COMPLETELY. SOMETIMES CHRISTIANS ARE TEMPTED TO BOW TO PRESSURE OF THE BUSINESS WORLD IN USING ALCOHOL IN THEIR BUSINESS CONTACTS. A CAREFUL LOOK AT HABAKKUK 2:15 MIGHT BE IN ORDER: "WOE UNTO HIM THAT GIVETH HIS NEIGHBOR DRINK, THAT PUTTETH THY BOTTLE TO HIM, AND MAKEST HIM DRUNKEN ALSO, THAT THOU MAYEST LOOK ON THEIR NAKEDNESS!" WE MIGHT BE SURPRIZED TO DISCOVER THAT GOD DOES NOT PLACE THE PRIORITY ON OUR JOBS AS WE DO. OUR FAITH IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN OUR FORTUNE.

II. WHEREFORE COME OUT FROM AMONG THEM AND BE YE SEPARATE - VERSE 17

THE IDEA OF THE LANGUAGE IS TO COME OUT AND STAY OUT. SOME FOLK GO BACK AND AS ONE COMMENTATOR SAYS, THEY WANT THEIR ROOTS IN THE CHURCH BUT THEIR BRANCHES TO HANG IN THE WORLD IN ORDER TO GET THE BEST OF TWO WORLDS. JESUS SAID THIS CANNOT BE DONE - YOU CANNOT SERVE TWO MASTERS. THE PRINCIPLE OF SEPARATION FROM EVIL IS TAUGHT THROUGHOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT. IT IS A SIMPLE FACT THAT TRUTH CANNOT BE EFFECTIVELY TOLD OR PROPAGATED BY COMPROMISE WITH EVIL AND COMPROMISE CANNOT BE AVOIDED APART FROM SEPARATION. FOR EXAMPLE, NOAH WAS SEPARATED FROM THE EVIL OF THE WORLD BY THE ARK AND THE FLOOD. ABRAHAM WAS COMMANDED TO SEPARATE HIMSELF FROM HIS UNBELIEVING RELATIVES IN UR OF CHALDEES. GENESIS 12:1. I HAVE ALREADY ELUDED TO THE TRADGEDY OF LOT'S LIFE BY HIS REFUSAL TO SEPARATE FROM THE WICKEDNESS OF SODOM. THE PATRIARCHS WERE BLESSED IN PROPORTION TO THEIR WILLINGNESS

1) light to them — yes
2) like them .. no.

TO SEPARATE THEMSELVES UNTO GOD FROM THE WORLD. ISRAEL WAS DESIGNED TO BE A SEPARATE NATION THROUGH WHOM GOD BLESSED THE OTHER NATIONS OF THE WORLD. ONE CANNOT UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF MOSES'S LIFE AND MINISTRY APART FROM HIS WILLINGNESS TO BE SEPARATED FROM THE ALLURMENTS OF EGYPT AND TO IDENTIFY HIMSELF WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD. THE PRIESTHOOD POINTED TO THE NECESSITY OF BEING SEPARATED THE COMPROMISE AND CONTAMINATION OF EVIL IN HOLINESS TO GOD. IN THE TIME JUDGES THE APOSTASY AND DISASTERS WHICH OVERCAME GOD'S PEOPLE WERE THE RESULT OF NEGLECT OF GOD'S STANDARDS OF SEPARATION FROM EVIL. TO BE SURE, THERE ARE MANY WRONG IDEAS ABOUT THE SUBJECT AS ILLUSTRATED BY THE PHARISEES OF JESUS' DAY. THERE ARE PHARISEES WHO MEASURE EVERYONE BY THEIR STANDARD OF SEPARATION. HOWEVER, THERE SEEM TO BE TWO BASIC AREAS OF SEPARATION FOR THE BELIEVER:

(1) ECCLESTICIAL - THIS INVOLVES SEPARATING FROM FALSE TEACHING AND THOSE WHO TEACH IT. (ROMANS 16:17, II TIMOTHY 3:5) THIS CHURCH WOULD NOT EXIST TODAY WERE IT NOT FOR THE PRACTICE OF THIS PRINCIPLE. WE LIVE IN A TIME WHEN THERE IS GREAT JUSTIFICATION FOR REMAINING IN APOSTATE DENOMINATIONS. THERE HAS BEEN A GREAT DEAL OF ACTIVITY IN SOME OF THE MAIN LINES OF DENOMINATIONS IN POLITICAL EFFORTS TO HELP LEFTIST, MARXIST CAUSES IN UNDERPRIVELEGED NATIONS EVEN TO THE POINT OF USING MONIES, CHURCH MONEY TO PURCHASE WAR MATERIALS! MY THEOLOGY PROFESSOR USED TO TALK ABOUT BEING "CURSED WITH A LOGICAL MIND." ANY GOOD BUSINESS PERSON WOULD KNOW THAT YOU CANNOT FUNNEL ENERGY, MONEY, AND OTHER RESOURCES INTO A BUSINESS THAT IS FUNDAMENTALLY WRONG IN ITS PHILOSOPHY AND MANAGEMENT. IT IS SIMPLY UNWISE TO DO SO.

ONE WOULD EXPECT GENUINE BELIEVERS IN CHRIST TO HAVE THE SAME GOOD JUDGEMENT WHEN IT COMES TO INVESTING THEIR TIME AND ENERGIES IN THE LORD'S WORK TO MAKE SURE THAT THE STRUCTURE IN WHICH ONE IS WORKING IS BIBLICALLY CORRECT AND SOUND!

(2) PERSONAL SEPARATION - ACCORDING TO ROMANS 12:1-2 AND I JOHN 2:15 TO MENTION BUT TWO VERSES, THE BELIEVER IS ENCOURAGED TO AVOID WORLDLINESS. AS YOU KNOW THE WORD WORLD IS TRANSLATED BY SEVERAL GREEK WORDS. THERE IS A WORLD FOR WHICH CHRIST DIED THAT MEN SHOULD LOVE. HOWEVER, THERE IS A WORLD SYSTEM OR KOSMOS GLAMORIZED AND CONTROLLED BY SATAN FROM WHICH THE CHRISTIAN SHOULD WITHDRAW. GOD IS SAYING THAT THERE IS A WORLD SYSTEM OVERWHICH SATAN IS THE RULER WITH ITS INFLUENCES, PHILOSOPHY, TEMPTATIONS THAT THE BELIEVER SHOULD SHUN. IT IS THE PHILOSOPHY OF INDEPENDENCE OF GOD AND GOD'S WORD, IN OTHER WORDS I GO MY OWN WAY, DO MY OWN THING, WHEN I WANT WHERE I WANT I OWE GOD NOTHING, NO ALLEGIANCE TO ANYONE OR ANYTHING BUT MYSELF. SIMPLY STATED ANY ACTIVITY OR ATTITUDE THAT IS INDEPENDENT OF GOD'S WORD IS WORLDLY. IT IS THAT SELF INDULGENT ATTITUDE THAT IS CONDEMNED IN THE BIBLE. SOMEONE HAS WELL SAID WORLDLINESS IS NOT JUST WHAT WE DO, BUT ALSO WHAT WE ARE! IT IS AS MUCH AN INNER ATTITUDE AS AN OUTWARD ACT! PLEASE KEEP IN MIND THAT I JOHN 2:15-17 DOES NOT SUGGEST WORLDLINESS IS AN OPTIONAL THING FOR A CHRISTIAN BUT IT IS SINFUL AND FORBIDDEN! LET ME ALSO SUGGEST THAT THE DEVIL PULLS SAME OLD TRICKS THROUGH CHURCH HISTORY. COMPROMISE HAS ALWAYS BEEN ONE OF HIS GREAT TOOLS. IN THE DAYS OF CONSTANTINE THE WORLD WAS INVITED INTO THE CHURCH AND WHEN THAT HAPPENED PURITY AND POWER OF THE CHURCH DECLINED. CHRISTIANITY

GAINED ATTRACTIVENESS TO THE UNBELIEVER IT WAS THE THING TO DO, THAT IS BE A CHRISTIAN. THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD BECAME INDISTINGUISHABLE. SOMEONE HAS SAID THAT THE TYPICAL AMERICAN IS 27 YEARS OLD, DOES NOT READ A BOOK A YEAR, IS IN LARGE MEASURE MATERIALISTIC IN HIS PHILOSOPHY, SATISFIED WITH SMALL PLEASURES AND BORED WITH THEOLOGY. ALTHOUGH HE MAY ATTEND CHURCH 27 TIMES A YEAR HE IS NOT INTERESTED IN THE SUPER NATURAL. HE IS NEITHER CONCERNED WITH HEAVEN OR HELL WITH LITTLE INTEREST IN IMMORTALITY. HIS PRINCIPAL INTERESTS ARE FOOTBALL, HUNTING, FISHING, AND CARS. THE OPPOSITE SEX IS ALSO INCLUDED. SOMEONE HAS SUGGESTED A TEST FOR WORLDLINESS. THE QUESTION IS ASKED WHICH DISTURBS YOU MOST?

Test For Worldliness

(1) A SOUL LOST IN HELL OR A SCRATCH ON YOUR NEW CAR?
(2) MISSING WORSHIP SERVICE OR MISSING A DAY'S WORK?
(3) A SERMON 10 MINUTES TOO LONG OR LUNCH HALF HOUR LATE?
(4) A CHURCH NOT GROWING OR YOUR GARDEN NOT GROWING?
(5) YOUR BIBLE UNOPENED OR YOUR NEWSPAPER UNREAD?
(6) CHURCH WORK NEGLECTED OR HOUSEWORK NEGLECTED?
(7) MISSING A GOOD BIBLE STUDY OR YOUR FAVORITE TV PROGRAM?
(8) YOUR TITHES DECREASING OR YOUR INCOME DECREASING?
(9) YOUR CHILDREN LATE FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL OR PUBLIC SCHOOL?

WHAT REALLY DISTURBS YOU MOST?

III. CLEANSE OURSELVES FROM ALL FILTHINESS OF THE FLESH AND SPIRIT - 7:1

THE TWO SIDES OF SEPARATION ARE MENTIONED IN THIS VERSE, NAMELY, CLEANSING FROM THE FILTHINESS OR THE POLLUTION OF THE FLESH AND PERFECTING HOLINESS. THE PROMISES MENTIONED IN THE VERSE HAD TO DO WITH THE PROMISES OF GOD MENTIONED IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, THAT IS, GOD WILL WELCOME AND WALK WITH THOSE WHO SEPARATE THEMSELVES FROM EVIL, BUT THE DECISION IS UP TO US. HOW MAY WE CLEANSE OURSELVES? ONLY GOD CAN CLEANSE FROM THE PENALITY OF SIN AND THAT IS THROUGH THE BLOOD OF CHRIST. IT INVOLVES THE CONSCIENCE OF MAN. CLEANSING FROM SIN'S POWER IS DONE BY GOD AS WE INVOLVE OURSELVES IN THE WORD OF GOD. THE CLEANSING INVOLVES BOTH BODY AND SPIRIT. SIMPLY STATED, IF WE WANT TO BE GOD'S PERSON, FILLED WITH HIS HOLY SPIRIT, BRINGING HONOR TO HIM EMPOWERED BY THE LORD IN OUR LIVES AND MINISTRY, THERE MUST BE A SEPARATION FROM EVIL, DEALING WITH SIN AND THE PURSUIT OF HOLINESS. THE IDEA OF CLEANSING - 34 YEARS AGO, THE FIRST PERSON I LED TO CHRIST DESCRIBED HIS FEELING AS: "AS IF I HAD HAD A BATH INSIDE." THAT DEFINITION HAS NOT BEEN IMPROVED ON THROUGH THE YEARS.

ROBERT K. SPRADLING

MARCH 14, 1982
A.M.

"WHEN SAD IS NOT BAD"
II CORINTHIANS 7:2-10

TO BE SAD IS BAD FOR US AND FOR THOSE AROUND US - WE TEND TO BELIEVE. HOWEVER, THIS IS NOT NECESSARILY TRUE. FOR EXAMPLE, A CHILD WHO DISOBEYS HIS PARENTS AND IS DISCIPLINED FOR THAT DISOBEDIANCE MAY BE SAD AND TEARFUL BUT THAT VERY DISCIPLINE MAY BE ONE OF THE BEST THINGS POSSIBLE IN HIS LIFE. IT MIGHT SAVE HIM FROM DISASTER IN THE FUTURE. A DR. CAUSES A GREAT DEAL OF PAIN TO THE PATIENT IN THE PROCESS OF TREATMENT. THE PAIN IS A NECESSARY PART OF THE RECOVERY PROCESS. THE HURT WILL REMIND THE PATIENT OF THE TREMENDOUS BLESSING OF HEALTH. THE SITUATION AT CORINTH HAD STEADILY WORSENED TO THE POINT THAT PAUL WAS NEARLY BROKEN HEARTED. PAUL WROTE I CORINTHIANS AND ITS STERN DISCIPLINARY MESSAGE TO COUNTERACT AND CORRECT MULTIPLE PROBLEMS IN THE CHURCH. HOWEVER, AFTER THE LETTER WAS DISPATCHED BY TITUS PAUL WAS RESTLESS IN HIS SPIRIT AS HE WAITED TO SEE HOW THE CORINTHIANS WOULD RESPOND. HE MET TITUS IN MACEDONIA AND LEARNED THAT THE TROUBLE HAD BEEN CORRECTED, THAT THE CHURCH HAD RESPONDED PROPERLY TO PAUL'S LETTER AND THE BURDEN WAS LIFTED FROM PAUL'S HEART. IN THIS CHAPTER, PAUL SPEAKS TO THE CORINTHIANS ABOUT SOME OF THE DIFFICULTIES THAT AROSE BETWEEN HIMSELF AND THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH BECAUSE OF HIS REBUKE. FROM IT, WE LEARN THAT SADNESS IS NOT ALWAYS BAD BUT MAY BE BENEFICIAL. PAUL SPEAKS OF HIS REGRET AFTER HE SENT THE LETTER, BUT LATER ON LEARNED THAT THE HAND OF GOD WAS IN THE WHOLE PROCESS AND HIS SADNESS AND THEIRS WAS TURNED TO GLADNESS.

I. SADNESS IS NOT BAD: WHEN FRIENDS ARE WILLING TO TALK - VERSES 2-4

THE WORD RECEIVE MEANS TO "MAKE ROOM, OR LEAVE A PLACE OR SPACE IN YOUR HEARTS FOR US. (THIS

WORD IS TRANSLATED "COME" IN II PETER 3:9). SOME AT CORINTH MAY HAVE CONSIDERED PAUL A CRITIC OR EVEN A CHURCH BOSS, BUT THEY WERE IN THE MINORITY. PAUL MAY HAVE REMEMBERED THE OLD DAYS AT CORINTH WHEN PEOPLE WERE GETTING SAVED AND GOING ON WITH THE LORD. WONDERFUL DAYS OF REVIVAL AND BLESSING IN THE CHURCH BUT NOW SIN HAD CREPT IN AND PAUL DID NOT WANT THE CORINTHIANS TO SHUT HIM OUT OF THEIR LIFE AND MINISTRY. IT IS EASY FOR BARRIERS TO ARISE WHEN DISCIPLINE OR CRITICISM IS ADMINISTERED. FEW IS ANY OF US RECEIVE CORRECTION WITH OPEN ARMS! PAUL REMINDED THE CORINTHIANS OF HIS RECORD, THAT IS HE HAD NOT WRONGED, RUINED OR CHEATED ANYONE. THE WORD "DEFRAUD" IS TRANSLATED IN II CORINTHIANS 2:11 WITH REFERENCE TO SATAN GETTING THE ADVANTAGE OR OVER REACHING THE BELIEVER. THE WORD IS USED OF COVETOUS OR GREEDY PEOPLE WHO SEEK TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OTHERS FOR THE SAKE OF GAIN. THE PRIMARY QUALIFICATION OF A SPIRITUAL LEADER IS A HIGH STANDARD OF SPIRITUAL LIFE. ST. PAUL WAS NO JIM JONES LEADING MEN INTO MORAL AND PHYSICAL DISASTER FOR HIS OWN SELFISH AND EGOTISTICAL PURPOSES. PAUL'S INTEREST WAS IN THE CHURCH AND THERE WILL BE OVER AND ABOVE HIS OWN SAFETY AND REPUTATION. ONE TRANSLATION OF VERSE 4 POINTS TO THE FACT THAT TO THEIR FACE, PAUL WAS CANDID AND FRANK WITH THE CORINTHIANS. WHEN HE SPOKE BEHIND THEIR BACK IT WAS ALWAYS WITH A SENSE OF PRIDE EVEN WITH A PROBLEM PEOPLE AND A GIFTED CHURCH. THE PHRASE "FILLED WITH COMFORT" AND "EXCEEDING JOYFUL" THE WORD EXCEEDING LITERALLY MEANS TO OVERFLOW WITH JOY. IN OTHER WORDS A REGULAR FLOOD OF JOY CAME INTO PAUL'S LIFE BECAUSE OF HIS ASSOCIATION WITH THE CORINTHIANS. THE WORD EXCEEDING IS TRANSLATED IN ROMANS 5:20 AS "MUCH MORE ABOUND." THERE IS A STRIKING CONTRAST IN THIS VERSE, NAMELY COMFORT AND JOY ARE NOT THE TERMS USUALLY ASSOCIATED WITH TRIBULATION! THE TERM TRIBU-

LATION OR AFFLICTION SUGGESTS SORROW, GRIEF, DEPRESSION, BLUES, AGGRAVATION, UPTIGHT AND ALL KINDS OF DISTRESS. QUESTION: HOW COULD THE CORINTHIANS BE ANGRY OR RESENT A MAN LIKE PAUL WHO WAS BOLD ENOUGH TO SPEAK THE TRUTH YET LOVING ENOUGH TO LET THEM LOOK INTO HIS HEART OF COMPASSION AND CONCERN FOR THEM? WHEN SOMEONE SAYS THAT THE VERY [illegible]T OF THEM BRINGS A FLOOD OF JOY AND COMFORT AND BLESSING INTO HIS LIFE - IT'S DIFFICULT FOR THE BARRIERS TO REMAIN UP. PRACTICAL LESSON: WHO OF US HAS THE CHRISTIAN GRACE TO SELECT OUR MOST OUTSPOKEN CRITIC AND APPROACH [illegible] WITH THE SAME OPENESS AND KINDNESS WITH WHICH PAUL ADDRESSED THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH. SUCH AN ATTITUDE MIGHT MELT THE COLDEST AND MOST DISTANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHRISTIAN BRETHERN.

II. SADNESS IS NOT BAD: WHEN TROUBLE BRINGS GOD'S COMFORT AND CHEER TO THE BELIEVER - VERSES 5-6

PAUL'S MINISTRY IN MACEDONIA WAS FRAUGHT WITH THE MEMORIES OF RIOTS IN EPHESUS, JAIL AT PHILIPPI, STONES AT LYSTRA. THE WORDS "NO REST" ARE ONE WORD IN GREEK. IT IS THE TERM ANESIN. HE HAD NO SOMINEX EITHER! PHYSICAL DANGERS AND EMOTIONAL PRESSURES CHARACTERIZE PAUL'S MINISTRY. IT SEEMS AS IF PAUL WENT FROM ONE CRISIS INTO ANOTHER. IN THAT SITUATION, PAUL SAID: "NEVERTHELESS GOD WHO HEARS THE DEPRESSED OR DOWNCAST" COMFORTED HIM. (THE WORD CAST DOWN LITERALLY MEANS HUMBLE OR LOWLY AND REFERS TO DEPRESSION THROUGH CIRCUMSTANCES RATHER THAN LOWLINESS OF CHARACTER. NOT EVEN PAUL WAS IMMUNE FROM THE DEPRESSION THAT ARISES OUT OF SEVERE CHURCH PROBLEMS AND THE LONELINESS OF LEADERSHIP. WHEN ONE READS THE BIBLE, HE GETS THE IMPRESSION THAT SPIRITUAL DEPRESSION WAS A COMMON CONDITION FOR MANY PEOPLE IN THE BIBLE, MOSES, DAVID, ELIJAH AND JONAH ALL

SUFFERED FROM DEPRESSION AT TIMES IN THEIR LIVES. IN MY EXPERIENCE AS A CHRISTIAN, I HAVE KNOWN A TIME WHEN MORE IS BEING SAID ABOUT DEPRESSION THAN NOW. ALMOST EVERY [redacted] A CHRISTIAN PERIODICAL CARRIES SOMETHING ABOUT EITHER THE FAMILY OR DEPRESSION. WE LIVE IN A CROWDED BUSY WORLD BENT ON SPIRITUAL SHIPWRECK! EVEN THE SAINTS MAY GET CAUGHT UP IN THE HURRY AND HASTE OF LIFE TO THE POINT THAT SPIRITUAL NERVE ENDS GET JANGLED. IT IS POSSIBLE, EVEN FOR CHRISTIANS, TO BECOME PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY AND SPIRITUALLY EXHAUSTED! THIS VERSE REMINDS THE BELIEVER THAT WE DO NOT NEED SOME KIND OF SPIRITUAL GURU WHEN THINGS GO WRONG. (I DO NOT MEAN TO SUGGEST THAT IN CASES OF CLINICAL DEPRESSION PEOPLE DO NOT NEED MEDICAL ATTENTION.) WHAT I AM SUGGESTING IS THAT FOR WHAT I WOULD CALL ORDINARY DEPRESSION WHICH TOUCHES EVERY BELIEVER AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER, GOD IS ABLE AND WILLING TO HELP US AS HE DID PAUL. IN PAUL'S CASE, THE ARRIVAL OF A FRIEND HELPED! MOST OF OUR BURDENS WOULD BEGIN TO BE LIFTED IF WE DID A COMBINATION OF THINGS SUCH AS GET BACK INTO THE BIBLE AND FEED OURSELVES SPIRITUALLY. GET BACK TO PRAYING. GET BACK TO CHURCH AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF SAINTS. BE CONCERNED ABOUT SHARING YOUR FAITH WITH SOMEONE ELSE. STOP LOOKING INWARD IN SELF PITY. I'M IMPRESSED WITH THE FACT THAT TITUS BROUGHT NO GIFT EITHER MONETARY OR MATERIAL, BUT ONLY GOOD NEWS ABOUT GOD'S WORK AND GOD'S PEOPLE. (UNLESS ONE HAS CARRIED A SPIRITUAL BURDEN FOR THE LORD'S WORK, IT IS DIFFICULT TO KNOW THE BLESSING WHEN THE BURDEN IS LIFTED.) PAUL WAS SO CLOSELY LINKED TO THE LORD'S WORK THAT HIS WHOLE EMOTIONAL WELL BEING WAS BOUND UP IN THE ONGOING OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST. AS IT FLOURISHED SO DID HE. WHEN IT WAS IN DIFFICULTY SO WAS PAUL.

III. SADNESS IS NOT BAD: WHEN SORROW LEADS TO REPENTANCE - VERSES 8-10

PAUL'S FIRST LETTER UPSET SAINTS AT CORINTH AND WHEN HE FIRST WROTE THE LETTER HE HAD SOME REGRETS BECAUSE HE KNEW SOME WOULD BE OFFENDED AND HURT BY ITS CONTENTS. PAUL GOT NO THRILL OR JOY OUT OF HURTING OTHER PEOPLE. THERE ARE FOLK WHO GET A KIND OF THRILL OUT OF SEEING PEOPLE WINCE UNDER THE SCURGE OF A TONGUE LASHING. THEY PRIDE THEMSELVES IN BEING CANDID AND RUDE BLUTN BORRISH AND UNKIND! SUCH PEOPLE NEVER HELP BUT ALWAYS HURT WHEN THEY ATTEMPT TO CORRECT OTHERS. IN THESE VERSES, PAUL POINTS TO THE FACT THAT GODLY SORROW LEADS TO A KIND OF REPENTANCE THAT BRINGS NO REGRETS. THE SORROW OF THE WORLD IN CONTRAST WORKS DEATH. IN THE WORLD THERE ARE PEOPLE LIKE CAIN, JUDAS AND ESAU WHO WERE SORRY OVER THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THEIR SIN BUT NOT NECESSARILY SORRY FOR THE SIN ITSELF. IN ONE SENSE THEY WERE SORRY THAT THEIR SINS WERE FOUND OUT. GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO IT AGAIN WITHOUT DETECTION THEY WOULD DO IT! GENUINE GODLY SORROW AND TRUE REPENTANCE IS A SORROW THAT COMES WHEN ONE SEES THE SINFULNESS OR WRONGFULNESS OF A DEED DONE AND A HATRED FOR THE SIN ITSELF. WE USED TO USE A WORD IN CHURCH THAT IS SELDOM USED ANYMORE - "CONVICTION" THIS WAS A CONDITION FOLK GOT INTO WHEN THEY CAME UNDER THE PREACHING AND TEACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD AND SENSED THEIR OWN NEED OF SALVATION IN CHRIST. IT MADE PEOPLE HARD TO LIVE WITH, BUT IT WAS A GOOD INDICATION THAT GOD WAS WORKING IN THE LIFE. TODAY, I FEAR THAT MANY OF OUR PROFESSIONS ARE WITHOUT AN AWARENESS OF THE SINFULNESS OF SIN. THAT IS WHY THE WORD REPENTANCE IS USED IN THE TEXT. REPENTANCE IN THE BIBLE IS MORE THAN SIMPLE REGRET OR SORROW. REPENTANCE IS A GENUINE SORROW OR CHANGING OF THE MIND ABOUT SIN BECAUSE IT IS WRONG IN THE

SIGHT OF GOD! IN OTHER WORDS IT IS A RECOGNITION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF ONE'S LOST CONDITION, THE SINFULNESS OF SIN, AND THE NEED OF GRACE. MEN NEED TO UNDERSTAND THEIR LOST CONDITION. IN AN AGE WHERE SUCCESS MONEY AND POWER ARE THE MEASURE OF MOST MEN A MISSING NOTE IN OUR PREACHING IS THAT MEN EVERYWHERE NEED TO REPENT. MAN HAS A SPIRITUAL ILLNESS CALLED SIN WHICH HAS NO CURE APART FROM THE GRACE OF GOD. MAN MUST ACKNOWLEDGE HIS RUIN AND GOD'S REMEDY. THREE VERSES ON REPENTANCE STAND OUT IN THE BIBLE:

(1) LUKE 13:3,5 IN THESE VERSES JESUS POINTED TO THE UNCERTAINTY OF LIFE, THAT SUFFERING IS NOT NECESSARILY A SIGN OF GREAT SIN IN LIFE, BUT WHETHER DEATH IS BY ACCIDENT OR OLD AGE THE DOOM IS THE SAME FOR THE SINNER WHO HAS NOT REPENTED!

(2) ACTS 17:30 THIS DECLARATION WAS MADE TO THE SUPREME COURT AT ATHENS. THE WORDS ALL MEN EVERYWHERE LITERALLY MEAN NO EXCEPTIONS!

(3) II PETER 3:9 I SUSPECT THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO HOPE FOR WHAT HAS BEEN CALLED "DEATH BED REPENTANCE." NOT MANY PEOPLE HAVE MADE PLANS TO GO TO HELL. THEY BELIEVE THAT SOMEWHERE SOMEHOW SOMEDAY JUST MINUTES OR HOURS BEFORE THEY DIE THEY WILL GET RIGHT WITH GOD. IN THE PAST 35 YEARS I CANNOT THINK OF ONE OR TWO PEOPLE I HAVE SEEN TAKE SUCH ACTION. MODERN MEDICINE HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH THAT. DR. BARNHOUSE USED TO TELL THE STORY OF A GOVERNOR OF TEXAS WHO VISITED A PENITENTIARY IN THAT STATE TO SPEAK TO THE PRISONERS. ON ONE OCCASION HE REMAINED BEHIND TO TALK TO ANY MEN WHO WANT TO SPEAK WITH HIM. THOUGH HE AND THEY KNEW THAT HE ALONE HAD POWER ON A INDIVIDUAL BASIS TO GRANT PARDONS. ON THIS ONE OCCASION A LARGE GROUP OF MEN REMAINED BEHIND TO SPEAK WITH THE GOVERNOR. MANY OF THE PRISONERS WERE IN PRISON FOR LIFE. ONE BY ONE EACH TOLD THE SIMILAR STORY HE HAD BEEN FRAMED, A VICTIM OF THE

MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE, PREDUDICE ON THE PART OF COURTS AND JURIES BECAUSE OF COLOR AND OTHER ECONOMIC SOCIAL FACTORS AND SO ON. FINALLY, ONE MAN SAID TO THE GOVERNOR SIMPLY AND CLEARLY: "GOVERNOR, I JUST WANT TO SAY THAT I'M GUILTY. I DID WHAT THEY SENT ME HERE FOR BUT I BELIEVE I'VE PAID FOR IT AND IF GRANTED FREEDOM I WOULD DO EVERYTHING IN MY POWER TO BE A GOOD CITIZEN AND PROVE MYSELF WORTHY OF YOUR MERCY." THAT MAN WAS PARDONED. ACKNOWLEDGING GUILT OR WRONG DOING IS TERRIBLY DIFFICULT BUT ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY IN ORDER TO BE FORGIVEN BY GOD. GOD WILL NOT FORGIVE WHAT WE WILL NOT ACKNOWLEDGE OR CONFESS.

ROBERT K. SPRADLING NOVEMBER 2, 1986

THE GENEROSITY OF JESUS

II COR. 8:9

WE WOULD EXPECT JESUS TO BE GENEROUS. THIS VERSE TELLS HOW. HE WAS RICH. HE BECAME POOR SO WE MIGHT BE RICH. WE UNDERSTAND RICH IN TERMS OF DOLLARS AND POSSESSIONS BUT OUR LORD WAS RICH BEYOND EVERY HUMAN MEASUREMENT. HE LEFT HEAVEN AND ALL ITS GLORY TO COME TO EARTH TO HELP THOSE WHO WERE POOR - SPIRITUALLY POOR, IMPOVERISHED AND HELPLESS. (ROMANS 5:8, JOHN 3:16) PAUL USED OUR LORD AS THE SUPREME EXAMPLE OF GENEROSITY AND AN EXAMPLE FOR US TO FOLLOW. NOVEMBER IS STEWARDSHIP MONTH IN OUR CHURCH. EACH YEAR, WE SET ASIDE NOVEMBER AND I USUALLY BRING ONE MESSAGE DESIGNED TO ENCOURAGE THOSE WHO DO NOT TITHE TO BEGIN AND TO ENCOURAGE WHO DO TITHE TO CONTINUE. IF YOU ARE NOT A TITHER, WE ASK YOU TO TITHE FOR ONE MONTH - THIS MONTH, AND EXPERIENCE ONE OF THE GREAT DELIGHTS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, NAMELY STEWARDSHIP OF LIFE. IF YOU ARE A BELIEVER AND SERIOUS ABOUT YOUR CHRISTIAN LIFE, SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY YOU MUST STOP "LEAVING GOD A TIP" ON SUNDAY, GIVING HIM LEFTOVERS OR LEFTOUTS IN LIFE. WE ARE NOT BEGGING FOR JESUS. WE ARE TALKING ABOUT THE BEST INVESTMENT PROGRAM IN EXISTENCE AND ARE OFFERING INFORMATION ON HOW TO ENROLL. IT IS THE INVESTMENT PROGRAM JESUS SUPPORTED!

(1) MATTHEW 6:19-20, II COR. 9:6 - IN THESE TWO VERSES NOTICE TWO WORDS: **STORE** AND **SOW**. IN THE CHAPTER BEFORE US, THERE ARE SIX PRINCIPLES OF STEWARDSHIP:

I. THE PRINCIPLE OF LIBERALITY - VERSE 2

THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM WAS POOR. THERE ARE SOME INDICATIONS THAT A FAMINE MAY HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN PALESTINE AND MANY OF THE BELIEVERS IN THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM WERE SUFFERING FROM SEVERE POVERTY. PAUL HAD SHARED THIS INFORMATION WITH MANY CHURCHES IN MACEDONIA. THEIR RESPONSE HAD BEEN REMARKABLE. THE CHURCHES IN MACEDONIA INCLUDING THE CHURCHES AT PHILIPPI AND THESSALONICA HAD DONE WELL IN HELPING THE MOTHER CHURCH IN JERUSALEM. THE IRONY OF THE SITUATION IS THAT THE CHURCHES IN MACEDONIA WERE THEMSELVES POOR! THEY DID FAR MORE THAN ANYONE EXPECTED INCLUDING PAUL! SOME THINK THAT REMARKABLE OUTPOURING OF GRATITUDE MENTIONED IN PHILIPPIANS 4:10-19 WAS PAUL'S RESPONSE TO THEIR GENEROSITY. IT IS AMAZING THAT IN THIS INSTANCE AND IN OTHERS IN CHURCH HISTORY IT WAS THE POOR WHO HELPED THE POOR! (FROM A PASTORAL POINT OF VIEW, I HAVE OBSERVED THIS PRINCIPLE AFTER TWO MAJOR BUILDING PROGRAMS IN THE PAST DOZEN YEARS. THE PEOPLE WHO APPEAR TO HAVE MEANS AND WHOM ONE WOULD EXPECT TO BUY BONDS AND INVEST SUBSTANTIALLY IN A BUILDING PROGRAM OFTEN DO NOT RESPOND! YET, PEOPLE LIVING ON FIXED INCOMES AND OTHER LIMITED MEANS ALWAYS STEP TO THE FOREFRONT IN THE LORD'S WORK. (COMMENT ON LADY ON SOCIAL SECURITY BUYING ONE OF THE FIRST $250 BONDS.) IN THE LORD'S WORK IT IS USUALLY ORDINARY PEOPLE DOING THE EXTRAORDINARY TO GET THE WORK OF GOD DONE. BY THE WAY, THIS IS ONE PASTOR WHO DOES NOT LAMENT THE FACT THAT WE HAVE NO WEALTHY PEOPLE IN OUR CHURCH! SOMETIMES, THE PRICE IS TOO GREAT IN SPIRITUAL LOSS WHEN THE WEALTHY ARE CATERED TO IN AN INDEPENDENT CHURCH. SIMPLY STATED, SOMETIMES LARGE

GIFTS CAN RUIN A CHURCH! (COMMENT ON RIVERSIDE CHURCH IN NEW YORK. ALSO MENTION RECENT CONVERSATION WITH PASTOR AT MARYSVILLE, MICHIGAN AND ALSO IN EVANSVILLE, INDIANA WHERE WELL-MEANING BUT EGOCENTRIC CONTRIBUTORS REQUIRED SOMETHING FROM THE CHURCH IN EXCHANGE FOR THEIR GIFT.) SUGGESTED EXPERIMENT: ASK GOD TO HELP YOU AND YOUR FAMILY BEGIN A STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM FOR HIS GLORY. IF YOU DON'T HAVE THE ABILITY TO DO SO, ASK HIM TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE AND TRY IT FOR ONE MONTH AND SEE WHAT GOD WILL DO - TEST HIM, PROVE HIM AS THE SCRIPTURE SUGGESTS.

II. THE PRINCIPLE OF SINCERITY - VERSE 8

THE PHRASE "PROVE YOUR LOVE" IS THE OPPOSITE OF MALACHI 3:8-10 WHERE GOD SAYS HE WILL PROVE HIS FAITHFULNESS TO THOSE WHO WILL GIVE! QUESTION: HOW DOES A PERSON PROVE HIS LOVE? IT IS CERTAINLY NOT BY TALK ALONE, THERE MUST BE EVIDENCE OR DEEDS, A RECORD TO VERIFY ONE'S FEELINGS. THERE IS A BOOK THAT PROVES OUR LOVE FOR CHRIST. IT IS NOT THE HYMNBOOK FOR WE OFTEN SING WHAT WE DO NOT MEAN! IT IS NOT THE PRAYER BOOK FOR WE OFTEN PRAY WORDS WE DO NOT MEAN IN AN EMPTY RITUAL THAT SOUNDS PIOUS BUT IS FULL OF SOUND AND FURY SIGNIFYING NOTHING. IT IS THE CHECKBOOK THAT GIVES EVIDENCE OF OUR GENUINE CONCERN FOR THE GLORY OF OUR BLESSED LORD. PAUL SAID TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH "ADD THE GRACE OF GIVING TO YOUR OTHER SPIRITUAL GIFTS."

III. THE PRINCIPLE OF CONTINUITY - VERSE 10

NOTICE THE WORDS BEGUN, PERFORM, DO. IN THIS VERSE, PAUL IS ENCOURAGING THE CORINTHIANS TO DO WHAT YOU PROMISE TO DO. IN FUNDAMENTAL CHURCHES, WE DO NOT MAKE PLEDGES

BUT IF WE PROMISE TO GIVE, PAUL SAYS KEEP THAT PROMISE. (COMMENT ON THE 300 PROGRAM WHICH WAS ONE OF THE REMARKABLE FINANCIAL PROGRAMS IN THE HISTORY OF OUR CHURCH WHEREBY IN OUR SECOND BUILDING PROGRAM WE INCREASED OUR ANNUAL GIVING BY ONE THIRD FOR A THREE-YEAR PROGRAM. IN THE PROCESS, THE ROAD CONSTRUCTION BECAME A DISRUPTION AND RESTRICTED NOT ONLY OUR GROWTH BUT IMPEDED OUR STABILITY IN ATTENDANCE AND STEWARDSHIP. IN THOSE DIFFICULT TIMES OUR 300 MEMBERS IN SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER STAYED WITH THE PROGRAM AND SOME HAVE BEEN WITH IT FOR SEVEN YEARS ENABLING THE CHURCH TO GO THROUGH DIFFICULT TIMES AND GROW AND STABILIZE BECAUSE SOME PEOPLE WERE TRUE TO THEIR PROMISE AND THEY DID NOT FAIL. SOME COMMENTATORS HAVE SUGGESTED THAT THE SPECIAL OFFERING FOR THE CHURCH OF JERUSALEM ORIGINATED AT CORINTH. HOWEVER, A FULL YEAR HAD GONE BY AND NOTHING HAD BEEN DONE TO IMPLEMENT THE PLAN. PAUL WAS SAYING TO THE CHURCH, NOW THAT YOU HAVE STARTED THE BALL ROLLING, YOU HAVE TALKED ENTHUSIASTICALLY ABOUT SHARING BY MEANS OF A SPECIAL OFFERING FOR THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM, NOW FINISH WHAT YOU STARTED A YEAR AGO! IN ANY ORGANIZATION INCLUDING A LOCAL CHURCH, IT IS EASY TO BEGIN PROGRAMS, IT IS DIFFICULT TO COMPLETE THEM. (FOR EXAMPLE, DRIVE THROUGH THE COUNTRYSIDE AND NOTICE THE UNFINISHED HOUSES, UNFINISHED ROADS, UNFINISHED PROJECTS THAT WERE BEGUN WITH GREAT ENTHUSIASM BUT SOMEHOW WERE NEVER COMPLETED. PAUL REMINDS THE LORD'S PEOPLE TO CARRY THROUGH WHAT WE BEGIN.

IV. THE PRINCIPLE OF RECIPROCITY - VERSE 14

THE WORD RECIPROCITY MEANS MUTUAL COOPERATION OR "RETURN IN KIND". IT IS OFTEN USED TO DESCRIBE TRADE POLICIES WHERE SPECIAL

ADVANTAGES BY ONE COUNTRY ARE RETURNED IN KIND BY ANOTHER. IT IS USED IN LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES WHERE LAW BREAKERS IN ONE STATE ARE TREATED IN KIND IN ANOTHER STATE, OFTEN THE STATE OF THEIR RESIDENCE. THERE SEEMS TO BE A PRINCIPLE IN LIFE AND IN THE BIBLE THAT GOD HAS A WAY OF REPAYING GENEROSITY WITH GENEROSITY, SHARING WITH SHARING. WE DO NOT GIVE TO GOD IN ORDER TO GET FROM HIM BUT IF WE LEARN TO BE GENEROUS WITH HIM AND OTHERS IT JUST SEEMS TO WORK OUT THAT GOD WILL BE NO MAN'S DEBTOR!

V. THE PRINCIPLE OF ACCOUNTABILITY - VERSES 20-21

WE ALL UNDERSTAND THE SIMPLE BIBLE FACT THAT ALL MEN ARE ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD FOR THEIR CONDUCT. HOWEVER, PAUL REMINDS THE CHURCH AT CORINTH THAT WE ARE ALSO ACCOUNTABLE TO MEN FOR THE WAY WE USE HUMAN RESOURCES, OR GOD'S PEOPLE ARE REQUIRED TO BE PHYSICALLY RESPONSIBLE. PAUL WAS VERY CAREFUL TO AVOID THE APPEARANCE OF WRONGDOING, TO STIFLE ANY CRITICISM CONCERNING THE WAY GIFTS TO THE JERUSALEM CHURCH WERE HANDLED AND DISTRIBUTED. HIS DESIRE AND PRACTICE WAS TO HAVE EVERYTHING ABSOLUTELY ABOVE BOARD. THEREFORE, HE APPOINTED SPECIAL MESSENGERS OR REPRESENTATIVES CHOSEN FROM THE CHURCHES IN MACEDONIA TO ACCOMPANY HIM AND TITUS BACK TO THE CHURCH IN ORDER TO MAKE SURE THAT EVERYTHING WAS DONE PROPERLY AND IN ORDER. NOT EVEN THE APOSTLE PAUL WOULD CONSIDER CARRYING THOSE FUNDS ALONE WITHOUT SAFEGUARDS. THIS IS WISE AND SCRIPTURAL FINANCIAL POLICY. THE CURRENT ISSUE OF LEADERSHIP MAGAZINE CONTAINS AN ARTICLE WHICH

TALKS ABOUT CHURCHES THAT HAVE GONE BANKRUPT IN THE PAST 5 YEARS BECAUSE ONE DOMINANT DICTATORIAL LEADER - NAMELY THE PASTOR - INSISTED ON ADOPTING UNWISE FINANCIAL PROGRAMS THAT EVENTUALLY LED TO BANKRUPTCY. EVERY ORGANIZATION INCLUDING THE CHURCH NEEDS WISE FINAICIAL POLICIES AND THE CHECKS AND BALANCES NECESSARY TO MAKE SURE THAT FUNDS ARE USED WISELY AND CAREFULLY FOR THEIR DESIGNATED PURPOSE. (IT HAS BEEN MY CONVICTION IN THIS CHURCH THAT EACH YEAR AN OUTSIDE INDEPENDENT AUDIT FROM AN AUDITING FIRM BE PRESENTED TO OUR CONGREGATION AT EVERY ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING. ANYTHING LESS THAN THISE WOULD BE TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE TO THE PASTORAL STAFF AND NONE OF US WOULD HAVE OUR NAME ATTACHED TO AN ORGANIZATION WHERE THIS WAS NOT DONE. ALSO IT IS MY CONVICTION AS A GIVER TO CHRISTIAN GROUPS OTHER THAN OUR LOCAL CHURCH - THOUGH THE TITHE COMES HERE AND SO SHOULD YOURS - NO MATTER HOW APPEALING OR APPARENTLY DESERVING THE CAUSE MAY BE THERE ARE CON ARTISTS, CROOKS AND CHARLATANS EVERYWHERE INCLUDING SUPPOSED CHRISTIAN ORGANIZATIONS. BEFORE ~~I WOULD CONTRIBUTE ANYTHING TO A RADIO, TELEVISION, MISSION, CHARITY FOR THE STARVING, WHATEVER,~~ I WOULD REQUIRE A ~~FINANCIAL STATEMENT~~ OF SOME KIND SHOWING HOW AND WHERE THESE FUNDS WERE USED. ORGANIZATIONS WHO REFUSE TO DO THAT OR TO GIVE THAT KIND OF ACCOUNTING WOULDN'T GET ONE SINGLE PENNY OF MY MONEY.

VI. THE PRINCIPLE OF EULOGY - VERSE 24

THE TERM BOASTING IN THE TEXT IS NOT A VAIN BRAGGING WHERE PRIDE RISES TO THE SURFACE OVER ONE'S PERSONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

PAUL IS SAYING THAT WHEN PEOPLE OR CHURCHES DO SOMETHING IN AN OUTSTANDING WAY RELATED TO STEWARDSHIP IT HAS A WAY OF ENCOURAGING PEOPLE EVERYWHERE. FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN PEOPLE TALK OF THE PEOPLE'S CHURCH IN TORONTO OR PARK STREET CHURCH IN BOSTON AND THE MULTIPLIED THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS GIVEN EACH YEAR TO MISSIONS, IT IS ALWAYS A SOURCE OF BLESSING TO THE CHURCH AT LARGE. SINCE OUR CHURCH GAVE TO THE AMAZON HOSPITAL PROJECT, I HAVE RECEIVED LETTERS, MET PEOPLE IN OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY WHO HAVE PRAISED GOD FOR OUR PART IN THAT PROGRAM. THAT ONE SUNDAY STANDS OUT AS THE HIGHLIGHT IN MY MEMORY IN THE HISTORY OF THIS LOCAL CHURCH. IT WAS A TIME WHEN PEOPLE BANDED TOGETHER TO GIVE SACRIFICALLY FOR A WORK TO THE GLORY OF GOD. THAT KIND OF GIVING IS WORTHY OF PRAISE. LET ME SUM UP THIS MATTER OF STEWARDSHIP IN THE FOLLOWING MANNER. YEARS AGO, DR. GEORGE TRUITT WAS ENTERTAINED IN THE HOME OF A WEALTHY OIL MAN IN TEXAS. AFTER DINNER, HIS HOST TOOK DR. TRUITT TO A ROOM IN HIS HOUSE AND LOOKING OUT THROUGH A LARGE GLASS WINDOW THERE WERE OIL DERRICKS DOTTING THE LANDSCAPE AS FAR AS THE EYE COULD SEE. THE MAN SAID, "DR. TRUITT, THIS IS ALL MINE. I CAME TO THIS COUNTRY YEARS AGO, POOR AND PENNILESS AND NOW AS FAR AS YOU CAN SEE IN EVERY DIRECTION - IT'S ALL MINE." DR. TRUITT PONDERED THE STATEMENT AS HE LOOKED AT THE OIL DERRICKS AND THE HERDS OF CATTLE INTERMINGLED AMONG THEM AND THE PHRASE "IT'S ALL MINE" RINGING IN HIS EARS. IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT THE HOST EXPECTED DR. TRUITT TO BE IMPRESSED AND TO MAKE SOME POSITIVE COMMENT ABOUT HIS POSSESSIONS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS. TO HIS ASTONISHMENT,

THE PASTOR SAID NOTHING. THEN IN A MOMENT, HE LAID HIS HAND ON THE MAN'S SHOULDERS AND POINTED NOT OUT ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE BUT UP TOWARD HEAVEN AND SAID: "MY FRIEND, HOW MUCH DO YOU OWN IN THAT DIRECTION?" THAT IS THE QUESTION WE NEED TO ASK OURSELVES DURING THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER WITH OUR EMPHASIS ON STEWARDSHIP.

ROBERT K. SPRADLING

MARCH 21, 1982
A.M.

"BY GRACE ARE YE SAVED: BY GRACE ARE YE STEWARDS"

II CORINTHIANS 8:1-24

WE CONSIDERED THIS PASSAGE IN NOVEMBER TO BE PART OF OUR STEWARDSHIP SERIES. I THOUGHT ABOUT SKIPING OVER IT, BUT SINCE WE ARE STUDYING II CORINTHIANS A CHAPTER AT A TIME, SURELY, THERE IS ENOUGH IN THIS CHAPTER TO MERIT TWO SERMONS IN A SIX MONTH PERIOD. WHEN WE STUDY THE WORD OF GOD, WE DO NOT DO SO IN A CAFETERIA STYLE, THAT IS PICKING AND CHOOSING WHAT WE LIKE, BUT WE TAKE EVERY COURSE AS IT COMES BECAUSE IT IS GOOD FOR OUR SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING. IN THIS CHAPTER, PAUL REFERS TO "THIS GRACE" NO LESS THAN FOUR TIMES. (COMPARE VERSE 7). IT TAKES GRACE TO GIVE. THE MACEDONIANS HAD BEEN SAVED BY GRACE AND THE GRACE OF GIVING WAS MANIFESTED IN THE CHURCHES. QUESTION: WHO IS THE BIGEST GIVER IN OUR CHURCH? THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION MAY HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THE AMOUNT GIVEN. THE SACRIFICE INVOLVED AND THE ATTITUDE IS FAR MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE AMOUNT. ONE OTHER OBSERVATION ABOUT THIS CHAPTER IS THAT NEW TESTAMENT GIVING IS CHURCH GIVING. IN THESE TWO KEY CHAPTERS, PAUL USES CHURCHES AND NOT INDIVIDUALS AS EXAMPLES. WHEN ONE NOTICES THE PHRASE "LAY BY HIM IN STORE" IN I CORINTHIANS 16:2 IT REMINDS ONE OF MALACHI 3:10 WHERE THE WORD STOREHOUSE IS USED. TO BE SURE, THERE ARE MANY CHRISTIANS TODAY WHO DO NOT BRING THEIR TITHES TO THE LOCAL CHURCH PREFERRING TO BE A MORE FREE LANCE KIND OF GIVER. IF THE TITHE IS THE LORD'S AND THESE CHAPTER DEAL WITH LOCAL CHURCHES AND GIVING, THEN IF A CHRISTIAN DOES NOT BRING HIS TITHES AND OFFERINGS TO A LOCAL CHURCH, IT MUST MEAN THAT HIS HEART IS NOT IN LOCAL CHURCH MINISTRY. - SO SAYS DR. WIERSBE. IN MY OPINION LOCAL CHURCH GIVING EXALTS THE LORD AND SUPPORTS HIS WORK. WHEREAS INDIVIDUAL

GIVING OUTSIDE THE LOCAL CHURCH HAS A TENDANCY TO RECOGNIZE AND EXALT INDIVIDUALS! THE CORINTHIANS WERE BLESSED WITH SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND MANY GREAT CHRISTIAN VIRTUES, AND PAUL ENCOURAGED THEM TO ADD THIS GRACE ALSO - THE GRACE OF GIVING. THE BELIEVER WHO IS GOING TO BE SPIRITUAL MUST ADD FAITHFULNESS IN GIVING TO THOSE OTHER VIRTUES IN ORDER TO HONOR THE SAVIOR. LET US EXAMINE SEVERAL PRINCIPALS OF STEWARDSHIP IN THIS CHAPTER:

I. A PRINCIPAL OF STEWARDSHIP: HARD TIMES AND LIMITED MEANS SHOULD NOT STOP THE PEOPLE OF GOD FROM DOING THE WORK OF GOD - V. 1-4 (V2)

YOU WILL REMEMBER THAT THESE TWO CHAPTERS DEAL WITH A MISSIONARY OFFERING PAUL WAS RECEIVING FOR THE POOR SAINTS IN JERUSALEM. THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM WAS IN A POVERTY STRICKEN CONDITION. THE CHURCHES IN MACEDONIA WERE RECEIVING A OFFERING TO HELP IN THAT SITUATION. HOWEVER, THE CHURCHES IN MACEDONIA WERE NOT WEALTHY BY ANY STRETCH OF IMAGINATION. THE CONDITIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES IN MACEDONIA WERE DIFFICULT TO SAY THE LEAST. ACCORDING TO VERSE 2 THE CHURCHES IN MACEDONIA WERE POOR. NOTE THE TERM "DEEP POVERTY" THE WORD POVERTY HERE MEANS TO BE A BEGGAR AND COMES FROM THE GREEK IDEA TO BE DOWN TO THE VERY BOTTOM. MANY OF THE CONVERTS IN THE CHURCHES IN MACEDONIA WERE FORMER SLAVES AND AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC LADDER. THERE IS A KIND OF EQUASION IN VERSE 2 DEEP POVERTY + PLUS LIBERALITY EQUALS OVERFLOWING JOY! IT IS A MISTAKE TO BELIEVE THAT THE RICH ARE GENEROUS AND THE POOR ARE NOT. IT IS OFTEN THOSE WHO HAVE THE LEAST TO GIVE WHO ARE THE MOST READY AND WILLING TO GIVE. (COMPARE WIDOWS MITE.) IT WAS THE LATE JOSEPH PARKER IN ONE OF HIS SERMONS WHO SAID: "WHO ARE THE PEOPLE WHO ADOPT CHILDREN? PERSONS WHO

HAVE NINE OR TEN OF THEIR OWN. WHO ARE THE KINDEST TO THE POOR? THE POOR." WHO ARE THE MOST LIBERAL AND GENEROUS IN THE LORD'S WORK - THOSE WHO SENSE THE JOY OF FORGIVNESS IN CHRIST AND WANT TO SHARE THAT BLESSEDNESS WITH OTHER PEOPLE. THE CHURCH IS FURTHER DESCRIBED AS HAVING GIVIN BEYOND THEIR MEANS AT WHO HAD BEGGED NOT TO BE EXCUSED FROM THE OFFERING, BUT WHO BEGGED TO BE INCLUDED! THE CHURCHES WERE WILLING, VOLUNTARY AND SACRIFICIAL IN THEIR GIVING. I FEEL SURE THAT PAUL MIGHT HAVE BEEN RELUCTANT TO SAY MUCH BECAUSE OF THE GREAT POVERTY IN THE CHURCHES, BUT A. T. ROBERTSON SAID: "THEY DEMANDED THE RIGHT TO HAVE A SHARE IN THE OFFERING." WHEN ONE THINKS OF SACRIFICIAL GIVING: THE STORY OF THE WEALTHY MAN WHO WEN DOWN TO THE DOCK TO WATCH MANY THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS WORTH OF HOSPITAL EQUIPMENT BEING LOADED ONTO A BOAT. A FRIEND SAW HIM THERE AND INQUIRED CONCERNING HIS PRESENCE. THE RICH MAN STATED THAT HE HAD COME TO THE DOCK TO MAKE SURE THAT THIS VALUABLE EQUIPMENT WAS SAFELY LOADED ABORD THE VESSEL. THE RICH MAN INQUIRED WHY HIS FRIEND WAS THERE AND HIS REPLY WAS THAT HIS ONLY DAUGHTER WAS ON THE VESSEL GOING TO THAT FOREIGN COUNTRY TO GIVE HER LIFE AS A MISSIONARY. WE TEND TO MEASURE SACRIFICIAL GIVING IN THINGS AND THIS IS IMPORTANT IN THE WORK OF GOD, BUT THE GIVING OF ONE'S LIFE IS LIFE'S GREATEST GIFT AND THAT IS WHAT PAUL SAID THE CHURCHES IN MACEDONIA DID - VERSE 5 "FIRST GAVE THEIR OWN SELVES TO THE LORD."

II. A PRINCIPAL OF STEWARDSHIP: JESUS IS OUR EXAMPLE IN GENEROSITY - VERSES 5-10

THE CORINTHIANS ~~POSSED~~ Possessed MANY WONDERFUL CHRISTIAN VIRTUES AND QUALITIES. IN VERSE 7 PAUL MENTIONS FAITH, AND THE ABILITY TO PUT THAT FAITH INTO WORDS ALONG WITH KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WORD AND HIS WILL. THAT PAUL ENCOURAGED

THE CORINTHIANS TO ADD TO THESE VIRTUES GENEROSITY. ACCORDING TO VERSE 8 HE WAS NOT GIVING ORDERS, BUT WAS CHALLENGING THE CORINTHIANS TO PROVE OR DEMONSTRATE THEIR LOVE FOR CHRIST IN A WAY OTHER THAN JUST TALKING ABOUT IT! THE GIFTED CHURCH AT CORINTH HAD MISSED THIS GRACE. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST DEMONSTRATED OR PROVED THE GENUINEOUSNESS OF HIS LOVE FOR US BY WHAT HE DID. JESUS WAS GENEROUS BY WHAT HE DID AND TAUGHT. FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND EVERY HUNGRY PERSON WAS FULLY SATISFIED WITH 12 BASKETS REMAINING. JESUS DID NOT THINK OF MINIMUM NEEDS, BUT OF MAXIMUM SATISFACTION. IN THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER, IT WAS A GENEROUS DISTRIBUTION OF SEED TO THE SOIL THAT WAS GOD'S WAY. WHEN THE PRODIGAL SON RETURNED TO THE FATHER'S HOUSE IT WAS WITH GREAT GENEROSITY THE FATHER RECEIVED HIM. EVERYWHERE IN SCRIPTURE OUR LORD CONDEMED PETTINESS AND PEEVISHNESS AS WAS REFLECTED IN THE PHARISEES WHO DELIGHTED IN BRAGGING ABOUT THEIR GIVING EVEN TO THE POINT OF COUNTING GARDEN SEEDS. OUR RICH AND WONDERFUL LORD IMPOVERISHED HIMSELF FOR THE SAKE OF UNDESERVING SINNERS. IT WAS HIS EXAMPLE IN THE INCARNATION THAT PAUL USED TO REMIND THE CORINTHIANS OF THEIR CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP RESPONSIBILITY.

III. A PRINCIPAL OF STEWARDSHIP: PAY WHAT YOU OWE, WHAT YOU PROMISE, WHEN IT IS DUE. - VERSES 10-15

THE IDEA OF A SPECIAL OFFERING FOR THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM MAY HAVE ORIGINATED AT CORINTH. AS A MATTER OF FACT, THEY MAY HAVE GIVEN SOMETHING INITIALLY, BUT A FULL YEAR HAD GONE BY AND NOTHING ELSE HAD BEEN DONE. PAUL ENCOURAGED THE CORINTHIANS TO CONTINUE WHAT THEY

STARTED. ONE NEED NOT BELABOR THE POINT THAT IT IS EASY TO BEGIN PROGRAMS IT IS DIFFICULT TO CARRY THEM TO A PROPER CONCLUSION. (THE IDEA OF MAKING A PLEDGE OR PROMISE TO GIVE IS FROWNED UPON IN FUNDAMENTAL CHURCHES PRIMARILY BECAUSE OF THE ABUSE THE PLEDGE HAS RECEIVED IN LIBERAL CIRCLES. THAT IS, CHURCH OFFICIALS SOLICITING UNSAVED FOLK TO GIVE IN THE FORM OF A PLEDGE TO CONTINUE CHURCH ACTIVITIES. OBVIOUSLY SUCH A PROCEDURE IS TOTALLY UNSCRIPTURAL. HOWEVER, I DO NOT IT IS WRONG FOR THE SAKE OF GOD'S WORK TO PROMISE TO GIVE OVER A PROLONGED PERIOD IN ORDER THAT SOMETHING OF A SUBSTANTIAL NATURE MAY BE DONE FOR THE LORD. AS A MATTER OF FACT, WE ALL MAKE PLEDGES EVERY DAY. EVERY TIME WE PURCHASE SOMETHING ON THE INSTALLMENT PLAN WHETHER IT BE AN AUTOMOBILE OR A MORTGAGE WE PROMISE TO PAY A GIVEN AMOUNT ON A CERTAIN DATE. IT IS INTERESTING THAT MOST OF US WILL PLEDGE OR PROMISE TO PAY FOR SOMETHING FOR OURSELVES, BUT WE WILL NOT DO IT FOR THE LORD. (SOMETIMES FOLK RESORT TO THE OLD SCRIPTURAL IDEA OF NOT LETTING THE LEFT HAND KNOW THE RIGHT HAND IS DOING AND THERE IS A REASON FOR THAT BECAUSE OFTEN TIMES NEITHER HAND IS DOING MUCH IN THE WAY OF STEWARDSHIP.) ACCORDING TO VERSE 14 THERE IS A PRINCIPAL IN LIFE THAT THINGS HAVE A WAY OF COMING OUT EVEN IN THE END. LIFE HAS A WAY OF REPAYING GENEROSITY WITH GENEROSITY AND STINGINESS WITH STINGINESS.

IV. A PRINCIPAL OF STEWARDSHIP: HONESTY IS THE ONLY POLICY - VERSE 16-24

SOMETIMES, FOLK LOOK UPON CHURCHES AS BEING UNSPIRITUAL IF THEY KEEP RECORDS ISSUE RECEIPTS AND USE OFFERING ENVELOPES. THE PERSON WHO WANTS NO BUSINESS LIKE RECORDS KEPT MAY HAVE A REASON FOR THAT. WE ARE ANXIOUS FOR PEOPLE TO KNOW THAT WE PAY OUR RENT, MORTGAGE, CAR PAYMENT AND OTHER BILLS ON TIME AND WE ARE ASHAMED, BUT

RATHER PROUD OF THAT FACT. WHY SHOULD ONE HIDE THE FACT THAT HE PAYS HIS TITHES TO THE LORD? IN THIS PASSAGE PAUL ADVOCATES CAREFUL HANDLING OF FUNDS. TO BE WELL MEANING DOES NOT MAKE A PROCEDURE OR METHOD RIGHT. TO GATHER FUNDS IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD WITH NO METHOD OF ACCOUNTABILITY OR NO SAFEGUARDS IS TOTALLY UNSCRIPTURAL. FUNDS GIVEN IN THE NAME OF CHRIST SHOULD BE CHECKED AND ACCOUNTED FOR. IN THIS PASSAGE, PAUL MENTIONED TITUS AND TWO OTHER BRETHERN CHOSEN BY THE CHURCHES TO ASSIST IN CARRYING THE OFFERING BACK TO THE SAINTS IN JERUSALEM. THERE ARE PROBABLY MORE SWINDLERS WHO MISHANDLE IN THE NAME OF RELIGION THAN ANY OTHER SINGLE AREA. ONCE AGAIN, I THINK THIS FACT BRINGS OUT THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL CHURCH GIVING. WORKS MAY BE INVESTIGATED AND SCRUTINIZED BY LOCAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP. WIERSBE HAS SAID IT WELL: "IF THE CHURCH CANNOT TRUST IT'S LEADERS, THEN IT OUGHT TO GET NEW LEADERS. IF IT TRUSTS THEM THEN IT OUGHT TO FOLLOW THEM." THIS CHAPTER SAYS ABOVE ALL ELSE THAT GIVING OF ONES MEANS IS A SPIRITUAL MINISTRY. DO NOT NEGLECT IT FOR IT IS A MARK OF GENUINE DEDICATION TO JESUS CHRIST. IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO SAY "I LOVE THE LORD, I LOVE MISSIONS, I WANT TO SEE THE GOSPEL SENT TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH." WE MUST PROVE WHAT WE SAY BY WHAT WE DO. LET ME CONCLUDE THIS STUDY WITH THE STORY MENTIONED IN NOVEMBER WITH REFERENCE TO OUR STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM. YEARS AGO, DR. GEORGE TRUETT WAS ENTERTAINED IN THE HOME OF A WEALTHY OIL MAN IN TEXAS. AFTER DINNER, HIS HOST TOOK DR. TRUETT TO A ROOM IN HIS HOUSE AND AS FAR AS ONE COULD SEE THERE WERE OIL DERRICKS DOTTING THE LANDSCAPE. THE MAN SAID: "DR. TRUETT, THAT'S ALL MINE. I CAME TO THIS COUNTRY YEARS AGO PENNILESS AND NOW I OWN EVERYTHING AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE IN EVERY DIRECTION - IT'S ALL MINE." TO THE EAST THERE WERE HUGE HERDS OF CATTLE INTERMINGLED AMONG THE DERRICKS AND THE MAN CONTINUED TO SPEAK OF THE FACT THAT IT ALL BELONGED TO

HIM. AFTER TALKING FOR SEVERAL MINUTES, THE HOST PAUSED, EXPECTING DR. TRUETT TO GIVE PRAISE AND TO SAY SOMETHING NICE ABOUT ALL OF HIS POSSESSIONS AND ACHIEVEMENTS. TO HIS ASTONISHMENT THE DR. SAID NOTHING. THEN IN A MOMENT HE LAYED HIS HAD ON THE MAN'S SHOULDER POINTED HIS FINGER UPWARD TO THE SKY AND SAID: "MY FRIEND, HOW MUCH DO YOU OWN IN THAT DIRECTION?" THE MAN DROPPED HIS HEAD AND SAID: "I NEVER THOUGHT OF THAT."

Sermon "The Amount"

ROBERT K. SPRADLING NOVEMBER 8, 1992

"THE GENEROSITY OF JESUS"

II CORINTHIANS 8:9

IF THIS VERSE HAD BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT YOU AND ME, IT WOULD HAVE READ DIFFERENTLY. "THOUGH WE WERE POOR, YET THROUGH CAREFUL PLANNING AND HARD WORK WE BECAME RICH, THAT THROUGH OUR RICHES OUR CHILDREN MIGHT BE RICH AND NOT HAVE TO WORK AS WE DID." THE DESIRE TO BE RICH IS A DOMINANT DESIRE. ALMOST NONE WANT TO BE RICH IN ORDER THAT THEY MIGHT BECOME POOR BY HELPING THE POOR BECOME RICH! JESUS NEVER GAVE A LITTLE, ALWAYS A LOT! THE PHARISEES MEASURED WHAT THEY GAVE - EXACTLY! IT WAS NARROW, COLD, AND CAREFULLY CALCULATED. WHEN JESUS PROVIDED WINE AT THE MARRIAGE IN CANA, IT WAS IN GREAT QUANTITY AND QUALITY. WHEN HE FED THE MULTITUDES THERE WAS A SURPLUS AFTER ALL WERE FILLED. HE DID NOT MEASURE MEALS IN MINIMUM AMOUNTS BUT RATHER SATISFIED THE HUNGRY. HIS FOLLOWERS EMULATED HIS EXAMPLE.

(1) MARY - ANOINTED JESUS' BODY BY BREAKING A VIAL OF OINTMENT OR PERFUME WITH NO IDEA OR EFFORT TO KEEP PART FOR HERSELF. IT WAS GIVEN FULLY, TOTALLY TO JESUS.

(2) THE PRODIGAL SON'S FATHER - HE BROUGHT FORTH THE BEST ROBE, A RING, SANDALS, MUSIC AND A FEAST - ALL THE BEST FOR THIS NE'ER DO WELL SON. THE EXPRESSION OF A FATHER'S LOVING HEART. WHEN JESUS DIED, HE DID NOT CALCULATE THE BENEFITS OF HIS DEATH FOR A FEW, BUT FOR THE WHOLE WORLD! WE ARE NOT SURPRISED, BUT RATHER EXPECT JESUS TO BE GENEROUS. AS HIS SONS, WE ARE EXPECTED TO FOLLOW HIS EXAMPLE. HIS WORK ON EARTH DEPENDS UPON THE GENEROSITY AND FAITHFULNESS OF HIS PEOPLE. YET MOST OF US ARE TURNED OFF BY THE TACTICS EMPLOYED IN THE NAME

OF RELIGION. LEADERS BEG, BROW-BEAT, ARM-TWIST, HIGH PRESSURE AND SQUEEZE FOLK IN ORDER TO RAISE MONEY FOR WHAT ARE CALLED "CHRISTIAN CAUSES." THROUGH THE MAIL, ON RADIO AND TELEVISION, AT CHURCH, BANQUETS - THE APPEALS NEVER STOP. FUND RAISING IS A SCIENCE AND A NECESSITY FOR MANY CHRISTIAN ORGANIZATIONS BUT A THORN IN THE FLESH FOR MANY CONTRIBUTORS. SURELY GOD DOES NOT EXPECT HIS WORK ON EARTH TO BE DEPENDENT UPON SUCH LOW LEVEL METHODS. DO YOU SUPPOSE THAT IF EVERY PROFESSING CHRISTIAN WOULD GIVE TO THE WORK OF THE LORD AS GOD HAS PROSPERED HIM THAT THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST COULD DO ALL GOD EXPECTS US TO DO IN REACHING A WORLD FOR CHRIST? HOWEVER, AS LONG AS FOLK TREAT GOD AS THEY TREAT A WAITRESS IN A RESTAURANT, THAT IS, "TIP" HIM ON SUNDAY - GIVE GOD THE LEFTOVERS OR THE LEFT-OUTS OF OUR FINANCES - THEN NOT MUCH WILL HAPPEN. THE BEST INVESTMENT PROGRAM KNOWN TO MAN IS ONE THAT IS SIMPLY OUT OF THIS WORLD! (MATT. 6:19-21 II COR. 9:6. NOTE THE EMPHASIS ON THE WORDS STORE AND SOW.) EACH NOVEMBER, WE EXPLAIN A PROGRAM DESIGNED FOR LONG-RANGE INVESTMENT AND LET YOU DECIDE IF AND HOW YOU WILL INVEST. WITH THIS IN MIND, LET US EXAMINE II CORINTHIANS, CHAPTER 8 EMPHAZING SEVERAL FEATURES OF A SOUND STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM. AS A MATTER OF INTRODUCTION PLEASE NOTE THAT THESE TWO CHAPTERS HAD TO DO WITH AN OFFERING PAUL RECEIVED FROM THE CHURCHES OF MACEDONIA FOR THE "POOR SAINTS" AT JERUSALEM. (ROMANS 15:26) PAUL'S REFERENCE TO JESUS UNDERSCORES THIS WHOLE MATTER OF GENEROSITY. JESUS GAVE AND GAVE UNTIL HE HAD NOTHING LEFT TO GIVE EXCEPT HIS LIFE AND HE GAVE THAT TOO!

I. THE PRINCIPLE OF LIBERALITY - 8:2

THIS IS A PLACE WHERE THE TERM "LIBERAL" IS USED IN THE BEST SENSE OF THE WORD. THE CHRISTIAN IS ENCOURAGED TO BE A LIBERAL GIVER. WORDS SUCH AS STINGY, TIGHT-WAD, PENNY-PINCHING, CHEAP SKATE, SKIN FLINT HAVE NO PLACE IN

Mk. 12:42: 13 collection boxes called The Trumpets. (so shaped) Lepton = "thin one" smallest of all coins = 1/16 of a penny!

Coaxing + gifts in return is not N.T. Stewardship!

= Sacrifical! (Not $ size that counts. She lead Band not by

CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP. GENEROSITY IS A VIRTUE WE ADMIRE EVEN WHEN WE DO NOT ADOPT SUCH A LIFESTYLE. THE WIDOW'S MITE IS A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF GENEROSITY THAT EXCEEDS A SELF-CENTERED, PROTECTIONIST ATTITUDE TOWARD ONES FINANCIAL RESOURCES. AS HAS BEEN MENTIONED, THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM WAS POOR. A FAMINE MAY HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN PALESTINE WHICH CAUSED SEVERE SUFFERING AND POVERTY FOR THE CHURCH. PAUL HAD SHARED THAT INFORMATION WITH MANY CHURCHES IN MACEDONIA. THEIR RESPONSE HAD BEEN REMARKABLE. THE CHURCHES IN MACEDONIA INCLUDING CHURCHES SUCH AS PHILIPPI AND THESSALONICA HAD DONE FAR MORE THAN WAS EXPECTED. THE IRONY OF THE SITUATION WAS THAT THE CHURCHES IN MACEDONIA WERE THEMSELVES POOR! SOME BELIEVE THAT THE REMARKABLE OUTPOURING OF GRATITUDE MENTIONED IN PHIL. 4:10-19 WAS PAUL'S RESPONSE TO THEIR GENEROSITY. ONE OF THE FIRST AND MOST SURPRISING LESSONS I LEARNED IN SEVERAL MAJOR BUILDING PROGRAMS IS THAT THE LORD'S WORK IS USUALLY FINANCED BY ORDINARY PEOPLE WHO GIVE IN AN EXTRAORDINARY WAY. BY THE WAY, THIS IS ONE PASTOR WHO DOES NOT LAMENT THE FACT THAT THERE ARE NO WEALTHY PEOPLE IN OUR CHURCH! SOMETIMES THE PRICE FOR LARGE CONTRIBUTIONS IS GREATER THAN THE LEADERSHIP OF A CHURCH SHOULD BE WILLING TO PAY! OFTEN LARGE GIFTS INVOLVE LARGE SAY IN CHURCH POLICY. SUGGESTED PROCEDURE: ASK GOD TO HELP YOU BEGIN A STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM IN YOUR FAMILY. IF YOU DO NOT SEE THE POSSIBILITY OF DOING THIS ON A REGULAR BASIS ASK HIM FOR GRACE TO DO IT FOR A LIMITED PERIOD, SAY ONE OR TWO MONTHS - TEST HIM AND SEE WHAT HAPPENS.

(1)

II. THE PRINCIPLE OF SINCERITY - 8:1

MANY A ROMANTIC ROGUE HAS PROMISED HIS SWEETHEART UNDYING, UNFAILING, UNDAUNTED LOVE. HOWEVER, THE PROMISES WERE SOON FORGOTTEN WHEN THE ROMANTIC MOMENT PASSED. AFTER SEVERAL SUCH FAILED PROMISES THE PERSON IS AMAZED TO DISCOVER

Phone! S.M.S-LIFE Spirits ... forgotten Promises!

THAT WHAT HE SAYS MEANS NOTHING TO THE ONE HE SAYS HE LOVES. IN OTHER WORDS, SOME FOLKS ARE "HEAVY WEIGHT TALKERS" AND LIGHT WEIGHT DOERS! WE PROVE OUR LOVE, ACCORDING TO THE TEXT, BY WHAT WE DO NOT WHAT WE SAY. THERE IS A BOOK WHICH PROVES OUR LOVE FOR CHRIST. IT IS NOT A PRAYER BOOK, OR A HYMN BOOK BUT RATHER A CHECK BOOK. THERE IS A RECORD TO VERIFY OUR WORDS. LOVE THAT IS SINCERE GIVES WHEN IT DOESN'T FEEL LIKE IT. IT REQUIRES NO PICTURES OF ORPHANS, NO PITCH TO FEEL GOOD OR ANYTHING DEALING WITH SENTIMENT, ONLY TO GIVE BECAUSE IT IS OUR CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY TO DO SO FOR THE GLORY OF GOD.

III. THE PRINCIPLE OF CONTINUITY - 8:10

PAUL ENCOURAGED THE CORINTHIANS TO DO WHAT THEY PROMISED TO DO. THEY SAID THEY WOULD DO SO MUCH FOR THE SAINTS IN JERUSALEM AND PAUL ENCOURAGED THEM TO LIVE UP TO THEIR PROMISE. FINISH WHAT YOU START - DON'T STOP HALF WAY THROUGH THE PROGRAM. (OUR CHURCH HAS BEEN BLESSED WITH SEVERAL SUCCESSFUL SPECIAL FINANCIAL PROGRAMS. OUR RECENT FOCUS ON THE FUTURE TO REDUCE INDEBTNESS HAS BEEN A BLESSING TO ALL PARTICIPANTS. PRIOR TO THAT, THERE WAS THE 300 PROGRAM WHICH WAS ONE OF THE REMARKABLE FINANCIAL PROGRAMS IN THE HISTORY OF OUR CHURCH. IT BEGAN IN ORDER THAT THE SECOND BUILDING PROGRAM INVOLVING THE FAMILY CENTER MIGHT BE BUILT. WE INCREASED OUR ANNUAL GIVING BY ONE THIRD INVOLVED IN A THREE-YEAR PROGRAM. IN THE PROCESS, THE ROAD CONSTRUCTION BECAME A DISRUPTION AND RESTRICTED NOT ONLY OUR GROWTH BUT IMPEDED OUR STABILITY IN STEWARDSHIP. IN THOSE DIFFICULT TIMES OUR 300 MEMBERS IN SUBSTANTIAL NUMBERS STAYED WITH THE PROGRAM AND CONTINUED ON EVEN THOUGH THE TIME PERIOD EXPIRED. SIMPLY STATED, THEY SAVED OUR BUILDING PROGRAM BECAUSE THEY DID NOT ONLY WHAT THEY PROMISED BUT FAR ABOVE WHAT THEY PROMISED TO DO!)

PAUL WAS SAYING TO THE CHURCHES, NOW THAT YOU'VE STARTED THE BALL ROLLING, NOW THAT YOU'VE TALKED ENTHUSIASTICALLY ABOUT SHARING IN A SPECIAL OFFERING FOR THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM - FINISH WHAT YOU STARTED A YEAR AGO! AS YOU WELL KNOW, IT IS EASY TO BEGIN PROGRAMS - IT'S DIFFICULT TO SUSTAIN AND COMPLETE THEM. IF YOU DOUBT THAT, DRIVE THROUGH ANY SECTION OF SOUTHERN WEST VIRGINIA AND NOTICE THE UNFINISHED BUILDINGS, UNFINISHED ROADS, UNFINISHED PROJECTS THAT WERE BEGUN WITH GREAT ENTHUSIAM BUT SOMEHOW WERE NEVER COMPLETED.

IV. THE PRINCIPLE OF RECIPROCITY - 8:14

THE WORD RECIPROCITY MEANS MUTUAL COOPERATION OR TO RETURN IN KIND. IT IS OFTEN USED TO DESCRIBE TRADE POLICIES WHERE SPECIAL ADVANTAGES BY ONE COUNTRY ARE RETURNED IN KIND TO ANOTHER. IT IS USED WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES WHERE LAW BREAKERS IN ONE STATE ARE TREATED IN KIND IN ANOTHER STATE. THERE IS A PRINCIPLE OF LIFE THAT GOD HAS A WAY OF REPAYING GENEROSITY WITH GENEROSITY, SHARING WITH SHARING. WE DO NOT GIVE TO THE LORD IN ORDER TO GET FROM HIM BUT IT IS TRUE THAT GOD WILL BE NO MAN'S DEBTOR AND WE CANNOT OUTGIVE HIM!

LUKE 6:38 THOSE WHO LEARN TO GIVE IN THE MANNER DESCRIBED IN THIS VERSE RECEIVE IN LIKE MEASURE FOR WHATEVER MEASURE WE USE IN DEALING WITH OTHER PEOPLE THEY WILL USE IN DEALING WITH US! IT IS AN UNFAILING RULE IN LIFE.

ECCLESIASTES 11:1 REMINDS THE READERS OF THIS BOOK NOT TO LIVE ONLY FOR TODAY. WHAT SOME WOULD CONSIDER WASTE MAY INDEED BE WISE IN THE LONG RUN. (II COR. 9:6)

"CAST YOUR BREAD ON THE SURFACE OF THE WATERS, FOR YOU WILL FIND IT AFTER MANY DAYS." (NASV.)

V. THE PRINCIPLE OF ACCOUNTABILITY - 8:20-21

THAT WE ARE ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD IS A CLEAR BIBLICAL FACT. HOWEVER, PAUL REMINDED THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH THAT WE ARE ALSO ACCOUNTABLE TO MEN FOR THE WAY WE USE HUMAN RESOURCES. IN THE HANDLING OF MONEY THERE MUST BE CARE, RESPONSIBILITY AND BUSINESS LIKE PROCEDURES. PAUL WAS CAREFUL TO AVOID ANY APPEARANCE OF WRONG DOING. EVERYTHING MUST BE DONE ABOVE BOARD WITH SUITABLE FINANCIAL SAFEGUARDS. THE CHRISTIAN WOULD BE WISE NOT TO CONTRIBUTE TO ANY SUPPOSED CHRISTIAN ORGANIZATION THAT DOES NOT HAVE ADEQUATE SAFEGUARDS AND STRONG FINANCIAL PROGRAMS TO PROTECT THOSE WHO CONTRIBUTE AND THOSE WHO CARE FOR THE FINANCIAL INTEGRITY OF THE INSTITUTION.

VI. THE PRINCIPLE OF EULOGY - 8:24

THE TERM BOASTING IN THE TEXT IS NOT TALKING ABOUT BRAGGING OVER PERSONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS. WHEN PEOPLE OR CHURCHES DO SOMETHING IN AN OUTSTANDING WAY ESPECIALLY IN THE AREA OF STEWARDSHIP IT HAS A WAY OF ENCOURAGING THE LORD'S PEOPLE EVERYWHERE. FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN THE PEOPLE'S CHURCH IN TORONTO OR PARK STREET CHURCH IN BOSTON RECEIVED MULTIPLIED THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS IT BECAME A SOURCE OF BLESSING AND CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH AT LARGE. WHEN OUR CHURCH GAVE SUBSTANTIALLY TO A HOSPITAL PROJECT IN THE AMAZON WE RECEIVED LETTERS FROM PEOPLE ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND MET PEOPLE IN OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY WHO PRAISED GOD FOR OUR PARTICIPATION IN THAT PROGRAM. THAT ONE SUNDAY WHEN WE RAISED OVER $50,000.00 FOR THAT PROJECT HAS BEEN A MISSIONARY HIGHLIGHT IN THE MEMORY OF THOSE ASSOCIATED WITH THIS LOCAL CHURCH.

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CONCLUSION LET ME SUM UP THIS MATTER OF STEWARDSHIP WITH A STORY ABOUT THE LATE DR. GEORGE TRUITT, PASTOR OF THE 1ST BAPTIST CHURCH IN DALLAS. ONE EVENING HE WAS BEING ENTERTAINED IN THE HOME OF A WEALTHY MAN. AFTER DINNER, HIS HOST TOOK DR. TRUITT TO A ROOM IN HIS HOUSE LOOKING OUT THROUGH A LARGE GLASS WINDOW WHERE OIL DERRICKS DOTTED THE LANDSCAPE. THE MAN SAID: "THIS IS ALL MINE. I CAME TO THIS COUNTRY YEARS AGO PENNILESS AND POOR, NOW AS FAR AS YOU CAN SEE IN EVERY DIRECTION, IT'S ALL MINE."

THE PASTOR PONDERED THIS STATEMENT FOR AWHILE, LOOKED AT THE DERRICKS AND HERDS OF CATTLE, INTERMINGLED AMONG THEM AND THE PHRASE "IT'S ALL MINE" KEPT RINGING IN HIS EARS. OBVIOUSLY THE HOST EXPECTED DR. TRUITT TO BE IMPRESSED AND HE MAY HAVE BEEN BUT AFTER A MOMENT OF REFLECTION HE LAID HIS HAND ON THE MAN'S SHOULDERS AND POINTED NOT ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE BUT UP TOWARD HEAVEN AND SAID: "MY FRIEND, HOW MUCH DO YOU OWN IN THAT DIRECTION?"

THAT IS THE KEY QUESTION ABOUT STEWARDSHIP. THAT IS THE EMPHASIS OF STEWARDSHIP MONTH AT BIBLE CENTER CHURCH.

ROBERT K. SPRADLING NOVEMBER 20, 1988

THE JOY OF STEWARDSHIP
(2 COR. 9)

THERE ARE OTHER "SHIPS" IN THE CHRISTIAN VOCABULARY SUCH AS SONSHIP, FELLOWSHIP, LEADERSHIP. STEWARDSHIP IS THE ABANDONED AND SUNKEN SHIP FOR MANY CHRISTIANS AND CHURCHES. IT IS A COMPOUND WORD MEANING THE LAW OF THE HOUSE OR THE MANAGEMENT OF A HOUSEHOLD. THE IDEA GOES BACK TO SLAVERY WHEN A MASTER OR ESTATE OWNER WOULD APPOINT A SLAVE OR SERVANT TO ADMINISTER HIS HOLDINGS. IT INVOLVED ADMINISTRATION OF HIS ENTIRE ESTATE OR HOUSEHOLD. PUBLIC OFFICIALS WERE ONCE CALLED STEWARDS. IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, STEWARDSHIP REFERS TO A SACRED TRUST INCLUDING THINGS SUCH AS THE GOSPEL, GIFTS AND GOLD. IN OUR TIME, THE WORD IS ASSOCIATED ALMOST ENTIRELY WITH MONEY BUT SCRIPTURALLY SPEAKING IT REFERS TO A CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE THAT SEES ALL OF ONE'S RESOURCES AS A SACRED TRUST FROM GOD. TOO OFTEN, THE WORD STEWARDSHIP IS GRIM BUSINESS. IN CHURCH LIFE IT IS VIEWED SOMEWHERE BETWEEN A TRIP TO THE HOSPITAL OR THE DENTIST. STEWARDSHIP PRACTICES HAVE BEEN DONE IN POOR TASTE LEAVING CHRISTIANS WITH NO TASTE FOR GIVING AND A BAD TASTE FOR CHARITY IN GENERAL. EACH NOVEMBER IS SET ASIDE AS STEWARDSHIP MONTH AT THE BIBLE CENTER CHURCH. I USUALLY BRING ONE MESSAGE DESIGNED TO ENCOURAGE THOSE WHO DO NOT TITHE. WE ASK YOU TO TRY IT FOR A SINGLE MONTH. ALSO, FOR THOSE WHO HAVE BECOME LAX, TO PICK UP THE SLACK ONCE AGAIN. STEWARDSHIP IS ONE OF THE GREAT DELIGHTS IN CHRISTIAN LIVING. SOMEWHERE WE MUST GET SERIOUS ABOUT THIS SUBJECT AND STOP "TIPPING" GOD ON SUNDAY, GIVING HIM LEFTOVERS OR THE LEFTOUTS OF OUR LIFE. THE BEST INVESTMENT PROGRAM IN EXISTENCE IS THE ONE IN WHICH YOU AND I TAKE GOD AS A PARTNER AND WATCH HIM

MANAGE OUR FINANCIAL AFFAIRS. OUR IDEAS ABOUT STEWARDSHIP DO NOT COME FROM MADISON AVENUE, DEVELOPMENT COMPANIES, GIMMICKS AND GADGETS BUT FROM THE BIBLE.

I. PUNCTUALITY IN GIVING - 9:5

THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH HEARD OF THE DEEP POVERTY IN THE JERUSALEM CHURCH AND ADOPTED A PLAN TO HELP PRIMARILY THAT OF A FREE WILL OFFERING. HOWEVER A YEAR HAD PASSED AND NOTHING HAD BEEN DONE. IN TODAY'S LANGUAGE, THE MISSIONS COMMITTEE ESTABLISHED THE PROJECT, THAT IS IT GOT OUT OF COMMITTEE BUT IT NEVER GOT OFF THE GROUND! THEY PROMISED TO DO SOMETHING BUT HAD NOT FOLLOWED UP ON THE PROMISE. IN A SENSE, THEY HAD PLEDGED TO DO SOMETHING. (COMMENT HOW THE LIBERALS HAVE RUINED THIS WORD FOR US. WE CALL IT "FAITH PROMISE" TO AVOID THE NEGATIVE CONNOTATIONS. SIMPLY STATED, PAUL REMINDED THE CORINTHIANS WHEN YOU MAKE A PROMISE TO DO SOMETHING, DO IT! (WE PLEDGE MISSIONARY SUPPORT - A PROMISE TO PAY AND PRAY FOR MISSIONARIES ON THE FIELD ON A REGULAR BASIS. THERE IS A SENSE IN WHICH A MORTGAGE OR INSTALLMENT PAYMENTS ARE PLEDGES TO PAY.) COMMENT REGARDING THE 300 PROGRAM.
I CORINTHIANS 16:1-2 - A VERSE LOADED WITH LESSONS ABOUT GIVING:

(1) THE PURPOSE - GIVING WAS FOR FOLK IN NEED IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD. "For the Saints" God's Church alive!

(2) THE PLAN - THE WORD ORDER MEANS BY ARRANGEMENT OR DIRECTION. THE WAY TRANSLATION SAYS: "TO ADOPT THE PLAN I ARRANGED FOR THE CHURCHES AT GALATIA...." THIS IS A REFERENCE TO A SYSTEM FOR GIVING. THAT IS, SYSTEMATIC GIVING IS GOD'S PLAN FOR HIS PEOPLE. IF

THERE IS NO PLAN, THERE WILL BE NO PARTICIPATION.

(3) THE PROGRAM - UPON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, SUNDAY NOT SATURDAY, IN PUBLIC WORSHIP GIVING IS AN INTEGRAL PART. THE OFFERING ON SUNDAY IS NOT "PASSING THE HAT," IT IS AN ACT OF PUBLIC WORSHIP OF GOD. IT IS AS MUCH WORSHIP AS SINGING, PREACHING, PRAYING OR ANYTHING ELSE WE DO IN HONOR TO GOD.

(4) THE PERSONS - THE PHRASE "EVERYONE OF YOU" IS REFERRING TO SAVED, NOT SINNERS. RICH, POOR, OLD, YOUNG NOBODY IS LEFT OUT - EVERYBODY IS EXPECTED TO PARTICIPATE.

(5) THE PLACE - THE WORD STORE SEEMS TO BE A REFERENCE TO MALACHI 3:10. THERE ARE TWO BASIC IDEAS ABOUT GIVING:

(A) FREELANCING

(B) LOCAL CURCH CONTRIBUTION

IT IS MY CONVICTION THAT CHRISTIANS WHO DO NOT BRING THEIR TITHES AND OFFERINGS TO THE LOCAL CHURCH SIMPLY DO NOT HAVE THE LOCAL CHURCH AT HEART AND HAVE NEGLECTED CLEAR BIBLE TEACHING ON THAT SUBJECT. POINT: WE ARE NOT TALKING ABOUT TOTAL CONTRIBUTIONS - OBVIOUSLY OTHERS NEED SUPPORT, BUT WE ARE TALKING ABOUT (6.) THE PROPORTION. THIS IS AN AREA SOME PEOPLE HAVE CONVENIENTLY OVERLOOKED. THEY STILL GIVE THE SAME AMOUNT TO THE LORD THEY GAVE 1, 5, OR 10 YEARS AGO - THE CHECK NEVER VARIES OR THE DOLLAR BILL NEVER INCREASES? FOR SOME, A $100 DONATION WOULD BE A GENEROUS OFFERING, WHILE OTHERS A

$10,000 DONATION WOULD BE SMALL. KEEP RECORDS AND CLOSE ACCOUNTS WITH GOD.

II. GENEROSITY IN GIVING - 9:6

IT WAS SAID OF AN ELDERLY SCOTSMAN THAT HE HAD ALL OF HIS GENEROUS IMPULSES UNDER COMPLETE CONTROL! EVEN A CASUAL READING OF SCRIPTURE INDICATES JESUS WAS GENEROUS. HE HAD LITTLE OF THIS WORLD'S GOODS AND WHAT HE HAD, HE GAVE AWAY. (II COR. 8:9) - GENEROSITY OF MAGNANIMOUS PROPORTIONS. JOHN 12:3 - MARY WAS GENEROUS, JUDAS WAS NOT. THE EXAMPLE IN THE TEXT COMPARES SOWING OF GRAIN WITH SHARING IN GIVING. THE PRINCIPLE IS SIMPLE: GIVE LITTLE -GET LITTLE, GIVE MUCH - GET MUCH. THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS, MATTHEW 25:15FF - RECOUNT GRAIN STORY IN FIELD WHERE RADIANT UNDER FLOOR WHERE ROTTED. (THE STORY IS TOLD OF A FARMER WHO IS KNOWN FOR HIS GENEROSITY. HIS FRIENDS FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO EXPLAIN HOW HE COULD GIVE SO MUCH AWAY AND YET HAVE SO MUCH HIMSELF. ONE DAY A FRIEND STATED THAT HE SIMPLY DID NOT UNDERSTAND HOW THIS COULD BE. THE FARMER REPLIED THAT IT WAS EASY TO EXPLAIN. HE SAID: "I KEEP SHOVELING INTO GOD'S BIN AND GOD KEEPS SHOVELING INTO MINE, BUT HIS SHOVEL IS MUCH BIGGER THAN MINE!")

III. HILARITY IN GIVING - 9:7

THE GREEK WORD FOR CHEERFUL IS HILARIOUS. WE USE THE TERM TO DESCRIBE SOMETHING THAT IS "FALL DOWN FUNNY." THE BASIC IDEA IS SIMPLY TO BE MERRY OR CHEERFUL, THE EXACT OPPOSITE OF SOMBER, SOUR OR SARCASTIC IN ONE'S ATTITUDE TOWARD CHARITY. WE ARE ENCOURAGED TO STAMP CHEER ON OUR CHECK

BEFORE WE DEPOSIT IT IN THE BANK OF HEAVEN! IN OTHER WORDS, OUR GIVING SHOULD BE GLAD AND NOT GRIM. IT IS A MATTER OF THE HEART. WHO AMONG US HAS NOT FELT THE EMOTION OF UNWILLINGNESS, RESENTMENT AND REBELLION WHEN NEEDS HAVE BEEN PRESENTED WITH REFERENCE TO THE LORD'S WORK. WE ARE SUSPICIOUS AND EVEN UPSET IN OUR GIVING. THIS VERSE SAYS WE SHOULD ENJOY GIVING TO GOD. WHEN FRANCES HAVERGAL WROTE THESE WORDS: "TAKE MY SILVER AND MY GOLD, NOT A MITE WOULD I WITHHOLD," SHE BECAME CONVICTED ABOUT WRITING ONE THING AND DOING ANOTHER. IN HER AUTOBIOGRAPHY SHE TELLS HOW SHE EXAMINED HER RESOURCES AND GAVE SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNTS OF MONEY TO MISSIONS INVOLVING SOME JEWELERY. SHE SAYS OF THE GIVING AWAY PROCESS: "I NEVER PACKED A BOX WITH MORE PLEASURE." - THIS IS AN ILLUSTRATION OF HILARIOUS GIVING. (COMPARE BARNABUS - ACTS 4:36)

IV. SUFFICIENCY IN GIVING - 9:8-11

THESE VERSES IN THE KJV SOMETIMES DO NOT REGISTER IN OUR THINKING ABOUT GIVING. "GOD IS ABLE TO MAKE IT UP TO YOU BY GIVING YOU EVERYTHING YOU NEED AND MORE, SO THAT THERE WILL NOT ONLY BE ENOUGH FOR YOUR OWN NEEDS, BUT PLENTY LEFT OVER TO GIVE JOYFULLY TO OTHERS...."YES, GOD WILL GIVE YOU MUCH SO THAT YOU CAN GIVE AWAY MUCH, AND WHEN YOU TAKE YOUR GIFTS TO THOSE WHO NEED THEM THEY WILL BREAK OUT IN THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE TO GOD FOR YOUR HELP." (LIVING LETTERS) THE BELIEVER DOES NOT GIVE IN ORDER THAT GOD WILL GIVE BACK WITH INCREASE. HOWEVER, WHEN THE CHRISTIAN LEARNS TO TRUST GOD IN STEWARDSHIP, GOD TRUSTS HIM WITH MONEY AND

WILL SEE TO IT THAT HE HAS ADEQUATE RESOURCES FOR HIMSELF AND OTHERS. GOD ENRICHES US AND ENLARGES OUR RESOURCES. NOTICE IN VERSE 10 TWO WORDS "MULTIPLY AND INCREASE." WHEN WE GIVE TO GOD, IT IS NOT A NOT A STEP TOWARD POVERTY BUT A LEAP TOWARD PLENTY. LUKE 6:38 (WEYMOUTH TRANSLATION) "GIVE AND GIFTS SHALL BE BESTOWED ON YOU. FULL MEASURE, PRESSED DOWN, SHAKEN DOWN AND RUNNING OVER SHALL THEY POUR INTO YOUR LAPS; FOR WITH THE SAME MEASURE THAT YOU USE THEY SHALL MEASURE TO YOU IN RETURN." DAD UNDERSTOOD THIS AND PRACTICED IT WITH PRODUCE AND FARM PRODUCTS. (COMMENT REGARDING STRAWBERRIES AND POTATOES.) THE STRANGE PHRASE "PEOPLE WILL GIVE INTO YOUR BOSOM" REFERS TO THE FACT THAT JEWS WORE A LONG, LOOSE ROBE DOWN TO THEIR FEET AND TIED AROUND THE WAIST WITH A ROPE OR GIRDLE. THE ROBE COULD BE PULLED UP SO THAT THE BOSOM OF THE ROBE ABOVE THE GIRDLE FORMED A KIND OF OVER-SIZED POCKET IN WHICH THINGS COULD BE CARRIED. SOMEONE HAS SUGGESTED IT IS THE MODERN EQUIVALENT OF HAVING LARGE POCKETS. WHEN WE GIVE, OUR RETURN WILL BE FLOWING OVER NOT ONLY FILLING BUT OVERRUNNING THE CONTAINERS. COMMENT: EVERY BELIEVER WHO HAS TAKEN GOD'S WORD SERIOUSLY UNDERSTANDS THE VALIDITY AND VALUE OF THESE VERSES.

Conclusion

(1) TRANSWORLD RADIO - PIEDMONT

(2) GRACE SEMINARY - HEDGING

(3) COLLEGE FOR KIDS - DID NOT SEEM TO BE POSSIBLE - NOW SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM FOR OTHER PEOPLE'S KIDS!

START TODAY TO PROVE YOUR LOVE - II COR. 8:8. THERE IS JOY IN STEWARDSHIP. IT IS ONE OF MANY JOYS IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. THE JOY OF THE SCRIPTURES, THE JOY OF SOUL WINNING, THE JOY OF STEWARDSHIP. (PHIL. 4:19)

ROBERT K. SPRADLING APRIL 25, 1932

"THE WAR WE DO NOT SEE"
II CORINTHIANS 10:1-18

THE COVER OF THE CURRENT ISSUE OF NEWSWEEK MAGAZINE CARRIES THE PICTURE OF EARTH ENGULFED BY NUCLEAR EXPLOSION. THE TITLE OF THE PICTURE IS: "THE NUCLEAR NIGHTMARE." MANY MODERN MEN ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED THAT THE HUMAN RACE IS STANDING ON THE THRESHOLD OF ARMAGEDDON. THOSE WHO SEEM TO BE MOST CONCERNED ARE SCIENTISTS INSTEAD OF THEOLOGIANS! SUCH A WAR, IF IT SHOULD COME WOULD ENGULF OUR PLANET AND EVEN THE WINNER OF SUCH UNTHINKABLE HORROR WOULD HAVE A HOLLOW VICTORY BECAUSE THE COST OF HUMAN LIFE AND RESOURCES STAGGERS THE IMAGI-NATION OF MEN. OUR PASSAGE TODAY SPEAKS OF ANOTHER KIND OF WAR, NAMELY, AN INVISIBLE WAR THAT BEGAN BEFORE EDEN, BUT HAD ITS EARTHLY BEGINNING THERE AND CONTINUES TODAY IN WHAT DR. GAEBELEIN CALLED THE CONFLICT OF THE AGES. DR. WIERSBE HAS WELL SAID: "THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A BATTLEGROUND AND NOT A PLAYGROUND. THE NEW BELIEVER WILL FIND HIMSELF SOON IN CONFLICT IN THIS WAR AND HE SHOULD BE ADVISED OF THE NATURE OF THE WAR, WHAT HE SHOULD WEAR, HIS ENEMY, PROTECTION AND THE ULTIMATE OUTCOME. PAUL USES TWO INTERESTING PREPOSITIONS IN VERSE 3. "IN THE FLESH" - IS A REFERENCE TO THE HUMAN BODY OR THE HUMAN CONDITION IN WHICH ALL MEN LIVE. PAUL IS REFERRING TO THE FACT THAT HE AND THE CORINTHIANS WERE HUMAN BEINGS, WITH HUMAN BODIES, IN A HUMAN CONDITION, IN A HUMAN ENVIRONMENT. THE SECOND PHRASE "AFTER THE FLESH" - THIS IS A REFERENCE TO MAN'S HUMAN NATURE OR THE NATURAL LEVEL OF LIFE. IT IS THAT PART OF MAN'S NATURE THAT IS IN OPPOSITION TO EVERYTHING THAT IS SPIRITUAL IN NATURE! THE FLESH IN A PERSON IS THAT SELFISH SIDE OF MAN THAT IS IN DIRECT OPPOSITION TO GOD AND IN CONTRAST WITH WHAT GOD DESIRES MAN TO BE. THE FLESH IS MAN'S HUMAN NATURE WITH SIN'S DOMINATION OVER THAT NATURE. IN OTHER

Gal. 5

WORDS, THE FLESH STANDS FOR MAN'S HUMAN NATURE WITH ALL OF ITS SIN AND IS WHAT MAN IS APART FROM THE GRACE OF GOD AND THE INDWELLING CHRIST. BARCLAY SAYS: "THE ESSENCE OF THE FLESH IS THIS. NO ARMY CAN INVADE A COUNTRY FROM THE SEA UNLESS IT CAN OBTAIN A BRIDGE HEAD. TEMPTATION WOULD BE POWERLESS TO AFFECT MEN, UNLESS THERE WAS SOMETHING ALREADY IN MAN TO RESPOND TO TEMPTATION. SIN COULD GAIN NO FOOTHOLD IN A MAN'S MIND AND HEART AND SOUL AND LIFE UNLESS THERE WAS AN ENEMY WITHIN THE GATES WHO WAS WILLING TO OPEN THE DOOR TO SIN. THE FLESH IS EXACTLY THE BRIDGE HEAD TO WHICH SIN INVADES THE HUMAN PERSONALITY." THE TERM WARFARE IS NOT THE WORD FOR A SINGLE BATTLE OR ENCOUNTER BUT FOR AN ENTIRE CAMPAIGN. THE BELIEVER IS ENGAGED IN A WAR THAT IS UNLIKE ANY OTHER KIND OF CONFLICT. IT IS NOT LIKE A PRIZE FIGHT WHERE ONE OPPONENT BATTERS ANOTHER, IT IS NOT LIKE A MILITARY BATTLE FOUGHT WITH BOATS, BOMBS AND BULLETS, BUT IT IS A WAR NEVERTHELESS, A WAR OF THE SOUL! JOHN BUNYAN UNDERSTOOD THIS SPIRITUAL TRUTH WHEN HE WROTE THE HOLY WAR. IT WAS THE CLASSIC STORY OF A CITY CALLED MANSOUL WITH THE DEFENDING TROOPS AND AN OUTSIDE INVADER SEEKING TO DEFEAT AND DESTROY THE CITY. SO IT IS IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE THAT EVERY PERSON IS A MANSOUL AND THE ENEMY OF HIS SOUL IS SEEKING TO DESTROY HIM! THE PHILLIPS OF EPH. 6:12 IS AS FOLLOWS: "OUR FIGHT IS NOT AGAINST ANY PHYSICAL ENEMY: IT IS AGAINST ORGANIZATIONS AND POWERS THAT ARE SPIRITUAL. WE ARE UP AGAINST THE UNSEEN POWER THAT CONTROLS THIS DARK WORLD, AND SPIRITUAL AGENTS FROM THE VERY HEADQUARTERS OF EVIL. THEREFORE YOU MUST WEAR THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD THAT YOU MAY BE ABLE TO RESIST EVIL IN ITS DAY OF POWER, AND THAT EVEN WHEN YOU HAVE FOUGHT TO A STANDSTILL YOU MAY STILL STAND YOUR GROUND." IN OTHER WORDS, THE CHRISTIAN'S

I. Eph. 6

1 Pet 5:8

CONFLICT IS NOT AGAINST PHYSICAL ENEMIES, BUT THE EVIL RULERS OF THE UNSEEN SPIRITUAL WORLD OR SATAN'S EMISSARIES WHO SEEK TO OPPOSE GOD, THE GOSPEL AND EVERY BELIEVER ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH! THE WEAPONS IN THIS CONFLICT ARE NOT WEAPONS OF THE FLESH. THE WEAPONS NORMAL MEN WOULD USE IN DEALING WITH CONFLICT ARE BRILLIANCE, INTELLIGENCE, CLEVERNESS, HYPOCRISY, HUMAN GIFTS SKILLS AND ABILITIES, PHYSICAL STRENGTH, THE ABILITY TO PERSUADE OR FLATTER OR CHANGE MEN'S MINDS BY EVERY POSSIBLE PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL PERSUASION. MOSES IN HIS FIRST ATTEMPT TO RESCUE THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL RESORTED TO MURDER AND PHYSICAL FORCE TO RESCUE ISRAEL. THAT UTTERLY FAILED, BUT HE WAS SUCCESSFUL WHEN HE RESORTED TO GOD'S POWER AND DIRECTION. THE DELIVERANCE OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL OUT OF EGYPT WAS NOTHING SHORT OF OR LENGTH THAN MIRACULOUS IN NATURE! THE WEAPONS OF THE BELIEVER ARE BASICALLY TWO IN NATURE: (1) THE WORD OF GOD. (2) PRAYER. "AND IN YOUR HAND THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT, THE WORD OF GOD. PRAY AT ALL TIMES WITH EVERY KIND OF SPIRITUAL PRAYER, KEEPING ALERT AND PERSISTANT AS YOU PRAY FOR ALL CHRIST'S MEN AND WOMEN." (EPH. 6:17-18 PHILLIPS TRANSLATION) (RELATE STORY TOLD BY GRACE DEAN CONCERNING HER HUSBAND BILL'S CONVERSION. THE PERSON WHO LED HIM TO CHRIST FROM ALL OUTWARD APPEARANCES WAS NOT THE KIND OF PERSON ONE WOULD EXPECT. EXPLAIN.) THE IMAGERY OF THIS VERSE IS THAT OF PULLING DOWN WALLS. THE WORD "IMAGINATIONS" AND THE WORD THOUGHT REMINDS THE BELIEVER THAT THIS BATTLE IS WAGED FOR THE MINDS OF MEN. IT IS TO THE BLINDED MIND THAT THE GOSPEL IS DIRECTED. THE WORD REPENTANCE LITERALLY MEANS TO CHANGE THE MIND. ACCORDING TO ROMANS 12:1-2 AN ACT OF INTELLIGENT OR SPIRITUAL WORSHIP ON THE PART OF THE BELIEVER IS TO PRESENT HIS BODY A LIVING SACRIFICE TO GOD, AND NOT LET THE WORLD SQUEEZE US INTO ITS MOLD AND THE WAY WE DO

THIS IS BY THE RENEWING OF OUR MINDS OR LITERALLY "LET GOD RE-MOULD YOUR MINDS FROM WITHIN". THAT IN TURN ENABLES THE BELIEVER TO PRACTICE OR TO PURSUE THE PLAN GOD HAS FOR EVERY BELIEVER TOWARD SPIRITUAL MATURITY. WE ARE REMINDED OF THE DEGENERATED RACE OF MEN PRIOR TO THE FLOOD. THAT RACE HAD LOST THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT THEIR TOTAL PHILOSOPHY IN LIFE WAS TOWARD EVIL. THEIR THINKING WAS SO CORRUPTED THAT MOSES SAID: "EVERY IMAGINATION OF THE THOUGHTS OF HIS HEART WERE ONLY EVIL CONTINUALLY." (GEN. 6:5). THE UNBELIEVER'S MIND IS IN REBELLION, HOSTILITY AND IN OPPOSITION TO GOD. HIS THOUGHTS, PHILOSOPHIES, PLANS AND PURPOSES ARE CONTRARY TO GOD'S. THE PHRASE: "EVERY HIGH THING THAT EXALTS ITSELF AGAINST THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD" SPEAKS OF MAN'S SELF EXHALTATION AND DESIRE TO CONTROL HIS OWN LIFE WITH NO INTERFERENCE FROM GOD. IT WAS LUCIFER'S PHILOSOPHY AND IT IS THE PHILOSOPHY OF ALL MEN OUTSIDE OF CHRIST. THE GOAL OF EVERY CHRISTIAN IS TO BRING HIS ENTIRE LIFE INCLUDING HIS THOUGHT LIFE INTO CAPTIVITY TO CHRIST. INSTEAD OF ERECTING INTELLECTUAL BARRIERS AND ADOPTING PHILOSOPHIES CONTRARY TO THE WORD OF GOD THE BELIEVER SEEKS TO KNOW GOD AND TO LIVE HIS LIFE ACCORDING TO GOD'S REVEALED REVELATION IN THE BIBLE. IN OTHER WORDS, ALL OF MAN'S HOSTILE REBELLION AGAINST CHRIST BECOME HIS PRISONER OF WAR IN THE CAMP OF CHRIST WITH HIS THOUGHTS VOLUNTARILY UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST. THIS IS THE RIGHT KIND OF "MIND CONTROL". THE PICTURE HERE IS OF A MILITARY FORCE TAKING OR CAPTURING A CITY OR STRONGHOLD AND LEADING ITS CAPTIVES OUT OF THAT STRONGHOLD INTO A NEW FORTRESS, NAMELY CHRIST. THERE THE CAPTIVE IS COMPLETELY CHANGED AND CONTINUES TO LIVE A LIFE THAT IS TOTALLY DIFFERENT FROM THE ONE HE LIVED IN HIS OLD ENVIRONMENT.

II. THE CRITICS - vs. 7-12

AFTER PAUL LEFT CORINTH, A GROUP OF FALSE TEACHERS INVADED THE CHURCH AND BEGAN SPREADING LIES ABOUT PAUL. THEY SAID THAT PAUL'S LETTERS WERE STRONG AND POWERFUL, BUT HIS PHYSICAL PRESENCE LEFT A GREAT DEAL TO BE DESIRED! IN OTHER WORDS, THEY LOOKED DOWN ON PAUL BECAUSE HE WAS PHYSICALLY WEAK AND FRANKLY NOT MUCH TO LOOK AT. HISTORY RECORDS THAT PAUL'S PHYSICAL APPEARANCE WAS NOT VERY FLATTERING. IT IS SAID THAT HE WAS A MAN OF SMALL STATURE, THIN HAIR, CROOKED LEGS WITH HEAVY EYEBROWS THAT SEEMED TO MEET AND A HOOKED NOSE - NOT A VERY IMPRESSIVE PICTURE OF AN APOSTLE OF CHRIST! LIKE ISRAEL WHEN THEY SOUGHT A KING, THE CARNAL CORINTHIANS PUT A GREAT DEAL OF EMPHASIS ON OUTWARD APPEARANCE, STRENGTH AND BEAUTY INSTEAD OF AN EMPHASIS UPON SPIRITUAL POWER AND GOSPEL CONTENT IN THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY! IT IS DIFFICULT FOR US TO IMAGINE ANYONE CRITICIZING THE APOSTLE PAUL! HOWEVER, ANY CHRISTIAN OR CHURCH THAT EMPHASIS ANYTHING OTHER THAN THE PURE, UNMIXED WORD OF GOD AS ITS PRIMARY THRUST HAS MISSED THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE AND CHRISTIAN LIVING. THE PROBLEM AT CORINTH HAD ALWAYS BEEN A PERSONALITY CULT AS REFLECTED IN CHAPTER 3.

III. THE CHALLENGE - vs. 13-18

THE FALSE TEACHERS AT CORINTH WERE COMPARING THEMSELVES WITH THEMSELVES AND COMING OUT WITH HIGHT MARKS! SOMEONE HAS SAID THEY SPONSORED AND ATTENDED THEIR OWN TESTIMONIAL DINNER AND HAD NOTHING BUT GREAT THINGS TO SAY ABOUT THEMSELVES! SIMPLY STATED, THEIRS WAS THE WRONG STANDARD OF MEASUREMENT. BARCLAY GIVES THE ILLUSTRATION OF A PERSON WHO MAY THINK HIMSELF A GREAT PIANIST UNTIL HE COMES

INTO CONTACT WITH A GREAT CONCERT PIANIST AND THEN OPINION MUST CHANGE. A MAN MAY THINK HIMSELF A GOOD GOLFER UNTIL HE COMPARES HIMSELF TO A HOGAN, JONES OR NICHOLAS. THE POINT IS OUR STANDARD OF MEASUREMENT IS JESUS CHRIST. THE SUPERINTENDENT OF A CERTAIN FACTORY WOULD TAKE HIS PLACE EVERY NOON AT A WINDOW LOOKING OUT ACROSS THE STREET AT CITY HALL. HE HELD THE CORD TO THE FACTORY WHISTLE IN HIS HAND. WHEN THE HANDS OF THE CLOCK IN THE TOWER AT CITY HALL WERE EXACTLY ON 12 HE WOULD PULL THE CORD AND THE WHISTLE WOULD PROCLAIM THE NOON HOUR TO FACTORY WORKERS THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE CITY. ONE DAY THE SUPERINTENDENT DECIDED TO CHECK THE ACCURACY OF THE CLOCK. HE TELEPHONED CITY HALL AND ASKED TO SPEAK TO THE MAN IN CHARGE OF THE CLOCK. "ARE YOU SURE YOUR CLOCK IS ALWAYS RIGHT?, QUESTIONED THE SUPERINTENDENT. CERTAINLY, WAS THE REPLY BECAUSE I CHECK IT EVERY DAY WITH THE NOON WHISTLE OF THE FACTORY ACROSS THE STREET.)

INSTEAD OF BOASTING ABOUT THEMSELVES PAUL CHALLENGED THE CORINTHIANS TO PREACH THE GOSPEL IN DISTRICTS OR REGIONS WHERE THE GOSPEL WAS NOT KNOWN. THIS WAS THE OFFENSIVE STRATEGY OF THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE. THE REGIONS BEYOND HAS BECOME THE BATTLE CRY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS. IT WAS DAVID LIVINGSTON WHO SPOKE OF THE SMOKE OF A THOUSAND VILLAGES WHERE THE NAME OF CHRIST WAS NOT KNOWN. SOMEONE HAS SAID THAT PAUL WAS HAUNTED BY THE REGIONS BEYOND. HE NEVER SAW A SHIP AT ANCHOR OR MOORED AT THE DOCK, BUT THAT HE WISHED TO BOARD HER AND CARRY THE GOOD NEWS TO THE REGIONS BEYOND. EVERY RANGE OF MOUNTAINS AND EVERY ROAD TO EVERY CITY IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE WAS A CHALLENGE TO PAUL TO TAKE THE GOSPEL TO THE REGIONS BEYOND. HIS LOVE FOR CHRIST AND THE SIGHT OF COUNTLESS MILLIONS MARCHING TOWARD A CHRISTLESS GRAVE HAUNTED PAUL TILL NERRO KILLED HIM IN ROME. SOMEONE HAS WELL SAID THE CALL OF THE CHRISTIAN IS FROM THE REGIONS BEYOND - ACTS 16:9, FROM THE REGIONS BELOW - LUKE 16:24

AND FROM THE REGIONS WITHIN - II COR. 5:14
(RECENTLY THE FOLLOWING STORY CAME TO MY ATTENTION. DR. W. LEON TUCKER A BIBLE TEACHER OF A GENERATION AGO TOLD THE STORY OF A BUSY SURGEON WHO PROFESSED TO BE A CHRISTIAN. HE HAD ONE DAUGHTER NAMED KITTY WHOM HE LOVED DEARLY AND SELFISHLY. ONE DAY THE DAUGHTER TOLD HER FATHER OF HER BURNING DESIRE TO GO TO CHINA. THE DR. FORBADE HER FROM MAKING SUCH A DECISION AND SAID QUITE SIMPLY THAT HE NEVER WANTED HIS DAUGHTER TO GET OUT OF HIS SIGHT AS LONG AS HE LIVED. FINALLY THE GIRL GAVE UP ALL PLANS TO GO TO THE FOREIGN FIELD, MARRIED AND HAD TWO CHILDREN. DR. TUCKER THE BIBLE TEACHER LIVED NEXT DOOR TO THE BUSY SURGEON. AFTER SEVERAL YEARS IT WAS LEARNED THAT HE COULD NO LONGER PRACTICE SURGERY BECAUSE OF THE CONDITION OF HIS EYES. AFTER AN OPERATION OR SO ON HIS EYES THE DR. LEARNED THAT HE WOULD TOTALLY BLIND WITHIN A FEW MONTHS. HE SENT FOR HIS BELOVED KITTY AND GRANDCHILDREN TO COME TO HIS HOUSE AND AS BLINDNESS WAS NEAR HE FORMED A MENTAL PICTURE OF HIS FAMILY HE LOVED SO DEAR. IT WAS A SAD AND DIFFICULT MEETING. MONTHS LATER LEON TUCKER HAD LUNCH WITH THE DR. AT WHICH TIME THE SURGEON ASKED: "DO YOU THINK GOD IS RETRIBUTIVE IN HIS DEALINGS WITH MAN?" TUCKER REPLIED NO HE DID NOT BELIEVE SO. THE DR. WAS NOT SO SURE BECAUSE HE WAS NOW HAUNTED BY THE WORDS OF HIS OWN MOUTH WHEN HE HAD HIS DAUGHTER THAT SHE COULD NEVER GO OUT OF HIS SIGHT AND FOR THAT REASON THE SURGEON BELIEVED THAT HIS SIGHT HAD BEEN TAKEN FROM HIM. HE ENCOURAGED DR. TUCKER TO WARN PARENTS ABOUT METTLING IN THE LIVES OF THEIR CHILDREN, ESPECIALLY CHILDREN WHO FEEL CALLED TO GOD'S SERVICE.)

ROBERT K. SPRADLING

MAY 2, 1982
A.M.

"A BIT OF BOASTING"
II CORINTHIANS 11:1-33

MOST OF US WERE TAUGHT THAT IS NOT NICE TO BRAG. IF THERE IS ANY BRAGGING TO BE DONE, LET SOMEONE ELSE DO IT. HOWEVER, WE DO UNDERSTAND AND EVEN CHUCKLE AT CERTAIN KINDS OF COMMERCIAL BRAGGING. FOR EXAMPLE, WE SMILE AT THE SIGN IN FRONT OF AN ATLANTA RESTAURANT WHICH SAID: "IF THE COLONEL HAD OUR CHICKEN RECIPE HE'D BE A GENERAL." THE YOUNGER GENERATION UNDERSTANDS AND SMILES WHEN THE OLDER GENERATION BRAGS ABOUT "THE GOOD OLD DAYS." THIS IS ILLUSTRATED BY THE STORY OF THE PREACHER WHO WHILE WALKING ALONG THE STREET SAW A CROWD OF BOYS SURROUNDING A DOG. WHEN HE ASKED WHAT THEY WERE DOING THEY REPLIED THAT EACH FELLOW WAS TELLING THE BIGGEST LIE HE COULD THINK OF AND THE FELLOW WHO TOLD THE BIGGEST LIE WOULD WIN THE DOG. THE PASTOR SAID: "MY, MY, MY, WHEN I WAS A BOY LIKE YOU I NEVER TOLD A LIE! THERE WAS MOMENT'S SILENCE AND THEN ONE OF THE BOYS SAID: "HERE, YOU WIN THE DOG. IN THIS CHAPTER, PAUL ENGAGED IN A LITTLE "SANCTIFIED, SARCASTIC BOASTING." IN VERSE 1, HE ASKED THE CORINTHIANS TO BE PATIENT WITH HIM OR BEAR WITH HIM WHILE HE TALKED LIKE A FOOL. IN VERSE 10 HE MENTIONS THE WORD BOASTING AS HE DOES IN VERSE 16 AND 17. THE FALSE TEACHERS WHO CREPT INTO THE CHURCH AT CORINTH HAD RIDICULED PAUL'S APPEARANCE AND HIS ABILITY TO PREACH. THEY HAD QUESTIONED PAUL'S CREDENTIALS AND HIS AUTHORITY AS AN APOSTLE. ACCORDING TO THEM, PAUL WAS A KIND OF FREE LANCE ITINERANT PREACHER NOT FIT TO LEAD GOD'S PEOPLE. THE GULLIBLE CHRISTIANS AT CORINTH WERE SWALLOWING THAT LIE! NO ONE AT CORINTH CAME TO PAUL'S DEFENSE SO INSTEAD OF LETTING THE CORINTHIAN

CHURCH SLIDE INTO THE CAMP OF FALSE TEACHERS BY DEFAULT, PAUL SOUGHT TO CONVINCE THE CORINTHIANS THAT HE WAS INDEED GOD'S TRUE MESSENGER. THE CORINTHIANS WERE READY TO LISTEN TO SELF-PROCLAIMED AND SELF-ACCREDITED FALSE TEACHERS, BUT WERE SLOW AND RELUNCTANT TO UNDERSTAND AND APPRECIATE THE SACRIFICIAL NATURE OF PAUL'S MINISTRY. THEREFORE, SINCE THESE NEW TEACHERS LOVED TO BRAG ABOUT THEIR CREDENTIALS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS, PAUL WOULD USE THAT VERY TACTIC TO SHOW THE UTTER FOLLY OF SUCH MEN AND PROCEDURES. IN THIS CHAPTER, THERE ARE FOUR IDEAS OR SUBJECTS WHICH PAUL TOUCHES UPON CONCERNING BOASTING. THE WORDS ARE JEALOUSY, GENEROSITY, HERESY, AND ADVERSITY.

I. A RIGHT KIND OF JEALOUSY - vs. 2-4

WHEN YOU AND I THINK OF JEALOUSY WE ARE REMINDED OF THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER, THAT VICIOUS VICE OF THE SOUL WHICH EATS AT AND DESTROYS THE SOULS OF MEN. IT SPEAKS OF SELFISHNESS AND RESENTMENT RESULTING IN HARM TO HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS AND YET, WHEN ONE READS THE OLD TESTAMENT IT SPEAKS OF GOD AS A JEALOUS GOD! THE QUESTION ARISES: "HOW CAN JEALOUSY BE A VIRTUE WITH GOD AND A VICE WITH MEN? (PACKER) OBVIOUSLY THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF JEALOUSY. ONE A VICE THE OTHER A VIRTUE. WE HAVE SPOKEN OF THE VICE, BUT THE VIRTUE IS THAT ZEAL TO PROTECT A LOVE RELATIONSHIP. IT IS BEST ILLUSTRATED BY MARRIED PEOPLE WHO GUARD THEIR MARRIAGE FROM OUTSIDE ATTACK BY ANYONE OR ANYTHING THAT SEEKS TO TEAR DOWN OR DESTROY THE VALUES IN THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP. FOR EXAMPLE, TRUE JEALOUSY IS THAT DESIRE OF A LOVED ONE TO PROTECT A MARRIAGE FROM AN ADULTERER BECAUSE AS PACKER HAS WELL SAID: "THE EXCLUSIVENESS OF MARRIAGE IS THE ESSENCE OF MARRIAGE." IN THE OLD TESTAMENT GOD'S COVENANT WITH ISRAEL WAS IN A MARRIAGE CONTEXT CARRYING WITH IT THE REQUIREMENTS OF LOVE, LOYALTY AND FIDELITY.

TO WORSHIP IDOLS WAS CONSIDERED A VIOLATION OF THAT COVENANT AND IT WAS CONSIDERED SPIRITUAL ADULTRY AND PROVOKED GOD TO JEALOUSY AND CORRECTIVE ACTION. PAUL SPOKE OF HIS RELATIONSHIP TO THE CORINTHIAN AS A PERSON WHO INTRODUCES TWO PEOPLE TO EACH OTHER AND AFTER THE COUPLE IS MARRIED THE THIRD PARTY IS CONCERNED THAT THE RELATIONSHIP BE STRENGTHENED WITHOUT OUTSIDE INTERFERANCE. AS A MATTER OF FACT, IN THE JEWISH WEDDING, THE FRIENDS OF THE BRIDEGROOM ACTED AS LIAISONS BETWEEN THE BRIDE AND THE BRIDEGROOM. IN THIS PASSAGE, PAUL USED THE METAPHOR OF MARRIAGE TO SHOW THAT THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH WAS PART OF THE BRIDE OF CHRIST, HE WAS THE HEAVENLY BRIDEGROOM AND PAUL WAS CONCERNED FOR THE CHASTITY OF THE BRIDE. HE FELT IT WAS HIS RESPONSIBILITY TO GUARANTEE THE PURITY AND FITNESS OF THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH UNTIL THE CHURCH MET THE HEAVENLY BRIDEGROOM. THE PEOPLE AT CORINTH WERE IN DANGER OF BEING LED AWAY BY FALSE TEACHERS. THIS CONTEXT WOULD INDICATE THAT ANY DEVIATION FROM CORRECT DOCTRINE IS A KIND OF SPIRITUAL SEDUCTION! SATAN IS IN THE BUSINESS OF DECEIVING CHURCHES JUST LIKE HE DECEIVED EVE IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN! THE USAGE OF THE TERM ANOTHER IN VERSE 4 REFLECTS THE DANGER THAT EXISTED AT CORINTH. DR. IRONSIDE UNDERSCORES THE WORD SIMPLICITY IN VERSE 3. HE SAYS: "GOD'S TRUTH IS ALWAYS RIGHT ON THE VERY SURFACE OF HIS WORD." WHEN PEOPLE ENTER INTO LONG ARGUMENTS AND DISCOURSES TO SUPPORT A SYSTEM IT IS USUALLY AN ATTEMPT TO TURN PEOPLE AWAY FROM THE SIMPLICITY OF GOD'S WORD. SO, THERE IS A JEALOUSY THAT IS RIGHT, CORRECT, COMMENDABLE AND GODLY. IT WAS THAT KIND OF "GODLY JEALOUSY" THAT PAUL HAD FOR THE CHURCH AT CORINTH.

II. A REMINDER OF GENEROSITY - VERSES 7-9

WHEN PAUL MINISTERED AT CORINTH, HE DID SO WITHOUT CHARGE OR FEES. HE ACCEPTED NO OFFERINGS OR CONTRIBUTIONS OF ANY KIND. HE MINISTERED THERE AND IT COST THE CORINTHIANS NOTHING! HE SPOKE OF "ROBBING" OTHER CHURCHES IN ORDER TO PROVIDE HIS MINISTRY TO THE CORINTHIANS. INSTEAD OF BEING GRATEFUL, THE CORINTHIANS WERE AGGRAVATED AND ANNOYED BY THIS FACT. IN GREEK CULTURE, IT WAS BENEATH A MAN'S DIGNITY, THAT IS A PROFESSIONAL MAN'S DIGNITY, TO WORK WITH HIS HANDS. FOR EXAMPLE, FOR PAUL THE RABBI TO WORK MAKING TENTS WAS BENEATH HIS DIGNITY. IN THE GREEK WORLD, TEACHERS WERE SUPPOSED TO MAKE MONEY FROM THEIR TEACHING. EVERY CITY COULD GRANT TAX EXEMPTIONS TO A CERTAIN NUMBER OF TEACHERS EACH YEAR. PAUL'S REFUSAL TO ENTER INTO THIS KIND OF PROGRAM CONCERNED THE CORINTHIANS. HIS POINT OF VIEW WAS THAT BY NOT ACCEPTING FUNDS FROM THEM, HE COULD SAY WHATEVER WAS NECESSARY WITHOUT WATERING DOWN OR TEMPERING THE TRUTH OF GOD WHICH THE CORINTHIANS NEEDED TO HEAR. ALSO, PAUL WANTED NO PERSON TO POINT A FINGER AT HIM SUGGESTING THAT HE WAS IN THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY FOR FINANCIAL GAIN. PAUL NEITHER ASKED FOR NOR ACCEPTED ONE SINGLE CENT FROM THE CORINTHIANS. THIS COULD NOT BE SAID OF THE FALSE TEACHERS THERE. APPARENTLY, IT WAS AS TRUE THEN AS IT IS NOW ANYTHING THAT WAS GIVEN AWAY IS OFTEN UNAPPRECIATED. (WE HAVE DISCOVERED THAT IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF BIBLES WITH CHILDREN. EVEN A NOMINAL FEE IS BETTER THAN NOTHING AT ALL.)

III. THE RECOGNITION OF HERESY - VS. 13-15

FROM THESE VERSES WE LEARN TWO STARTLING AND SUPRISING FACTS ABOUT SATAN. (1) THE DEVIL GOES TO CHURCH. (2) SOMETIMES HE PREACHES FROM THE PULPIT. NOTICE THE PHRASE:

"HIS MINISTERS" - THESE ARE THE MINISTERS OF SATAN WHO MASQUERADE AS PREACHERS OF TRUTH. THEY ARE SATAN'S COUNTERFEITS. AS YOU KNOW, A COUNTERFEIT IS A GREAT DEAL LIKE THE REAL THING AND NOT A GREAT DEAL UNLIKE IT! SATAN IS A WISE STRATEGIST AND HE KNOWS THE MOST EFFECTIVE PLACE TO DESIMINATE FALSE DOCTRINE IS FROM THE PULPIT. THE LORD WARNED HIS FOLLOWERS TO BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS WHO CAME TO THEM IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING, BUT INWARDLY THEY WERE RAVENING WOLVES. THE WORD RAVENING MEANS GREEDY. IN OTHER WORDS, ONE DOES NOT JUDGE TRUTH BY APPEARANCE. IN BIBLICAL TIMES THE FACT THAT A MAN WORE A SHEPHERD'S DRESS DID NOT MEAN IN FACT THAT HE WAS SHEPHERD! THESE VERSES SHOULD AWAKEN GOD'S PEOPLE TO THE FACT THAT A PERSON MAY BE A GRACIOUS, PERSONALLY ATTRACTIVE NICE PERSON, BUT ONE WHO PREACHES SHEER HERESY! THESE VERSES REMIND US THAT SATAN DID NOT HORNS, TAIL, HOOFS AND A PITCH-FORK, BUT HE MORE OFTEN COMES IN KINDLY SOFT TENDER WORDS WITH CULTURED REFINED MANNERISMS, BUT HIS MESSAGE IS DEVOID OF GRACE AND THE BLOOD SATAN'S MESSAGE IS ALWAYS ONE OF MANMADE HUMAN RIGHTEOUSNESS IN CONTRAST TO CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR SALVATION. THE TENDENCY TO MASK CHRISTIANITY IN SUPERFICIAL DRESS AND NOT IN GENUINE CONVERSION HAS BEEN A PROBLEM ON THE MISSION FIELD AS MUCH AS IN THIS COUNTRY. SEVERAL YEARS AGO IN UGANDA, AFRICA ONE PARTICULAR DREW UP FOUR TESTS TO DETERMINE THE GENUINENESS OF A PERSON'S PROFESSION. THE TESTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

(1) DO YOU KNOW IF YOU ARE SAVED? (IF NOT, WHY NOT?)

(2) ARE YOU GROWING IN GRACE THROUGH THE STUDY OF THE WORD OF GOD, PRAYER AND FELLOWSHIP WITH THE SAINTS?

(3) DO YOU HAVE A DESIRE TO GET THE GOSPEL TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH AND TO SHARE YOUR

FAITH WITH OTHER PEOPLE? FAILURE OF THIS TEST WOULD INDICATE THE UNREALITY OF A PROFESSED FAITH THAT WAS NOT PRACTICED.

IV. THE RIGORS OF ADVERSITY - vs. 23-33

THE FALSE TEACHERS AT CORINTH GAVE LIP SERVICE TO HIS SERVICE, BUT PAUL SAID THAT HIS CREDENTIALS FOR THE APOSTLESHIP WERE HIS SCARS. (RELATE STORY OF A MAN'S DREAM AND HIS CONVERSATION IN HEAVEN WHEN PAUL ASKED TO SEE HIS SCARS.) IF THEY ARE REALLY MINISTERS OF CHRIST AS THEY CLAIM, WHERE IS THE PRACTICAL EVIDENCE OF THEIR SACRIFICIAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORK OF CHRIST. PAUL WAS A STRONG ADVOCATE IN THE PRINCIPLE THAT IF WE DO NOT BLEED WE DO NOT BLESS. WHEN ONE READS THIS CATALOG OF HARDSHIP AND SUFFERINGS IT IS NO WONDER THAT JOHN MARK GOT SCARED AND RETURNED HOME ON ONE OF PAUL'S EARLY MISSIONARY JOURNEYS! I AM OF THE OPINION THAT PAUL WOULD NEVER HAD MENTIONED MANY OF THESE HARDSHIPS HAD HE NOT BEEN DEFENDING THE GOSPEL AGAINST FALSE TEACHING. HE IS NOT MENTIONING THESE DIFFICULTIES TO EXACT SYMPATHY AND APPROVAL FROM MEN, BUT RATHER TO PROVE HIS APOSTLESHIP. IN THIS LIST HE MENTIONS JEWISH PUNISHMENT. THE STRIPES REFER TO SCOURAGING. HE ALSO MENTIONS ROMAN PUNISHMENT. THE TERM RODS SPEAKS TO THE EQUIPMENT OF MAGISTRATES WHO USED SUCH TO PUNISH GUILTY CRIMINALS. IT IS ASTONISHING TO READ THIS VERSE IN THE LIGHT OF THE FACT THAT UNDER ROMAN LAW IT WAS A CRIME TO PUNISH OR BEAT A ROMAN CITIZEN AND PAUL WAS A ROMAN CITIZEN. HOWEVER, ON OCCASION WHEN PAUL ENCOUNTERED A VIOLENT MOB OF ROMAN CITIZENS AND OFFICIALS THEY DID NOT STOP TO ASK OF HIS CITIZENSHIP. THEY WERE ONLY INTERESTED IN AFFLICTING (inflicting) PUNISHMENT. PAUL MENTIONS HIS DANGERS IN TRAVELING. NAVIGATION BY SEA WAS DANGEROUS AND PERILOUS. ALTHOUGH, SOME BELIEVED THE SEA WAS SAFER THAN THE ROADS IN PAUL'S DAY. TRAVEL WAS SLOW AND ONLY THE WEALTHY COULD AFFORD

GOOD HORSES AND CARRIAGES. MOST TRAVELERS HAD TO WALK OR RIDE DONKEYS OR MULES. LONELY ROADS AND MOUNTAIN PASSES WERE INFESTED WITH THEIVES AND ROBBERS. THERE WERE NO COMFORTABLE RESTAURANTS OR HOTELS TO SOOTH AND COMFORT THE WEARY TRAVELER. HE HAD TO DEPEND LARGELY ON THE HOSPITALITY OF FELLOW CHRISTIANS ALONG THE WAY. IN TIMES OF MENTAL, PHYSICAL EXHAUSTION DESTITUTE OF PHYSICAL NECESSITIES PAUL CONTINUED TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH WITH THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL. HE PROVED HIS DEDICATION TO THE GOSPEL BY HIS SACRIFICE AND SUFFERING FOR THE GOSPEL. IT IS THE ULTIMATE TEST. TO CONCLUDE THIS LONG LIST, PAUL ADDS THE CARE OF ALL THE CHURCHES. ONLY THOSE WHO HAVE SHARED SUCH RESPONSIBILITY UNDERSTAND HOW HEAVY THAT BURDEN AND RESPONSIBILITY CAN BE. SPIRITUAL BATTLES ARE ALWAYS MORE DIFFICULT THAN PHYSICAL ONES. THE BURDEN OF FEEDING GOD'S FLOCK, DEFENDING THEM AGAINST SATANIC ATTACKS, INSTRUCTING AND PRAYING FOR NEW BELIEVERS IS HARD WORK AND EXHAUSTING TO THE SOUL. THERE IS NO WEARINESS IN THE WORLD LIKE THE SUSTAINED BURDEN OF CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SPIRITUAL CARE OF THE FLOCK OF GOD. PAUL COULD NOT AND WOULD NOT LET THE WOLVES DEVOUR THE SHEEP OF GOD. HIS ULTIMATE WEAPON WAS THE WORD OF GOD. THE CLOSING VERSE OF THIS CHAPTER AROUSES INTEREST. APPARENTLY THERE WAS SOMETHING VERY SIGNIFICANT ABOUT THE FACT THAT THIS DISTINGUISHED TEACHER HAD TO BE WHISKED OUT OF DAMASCUS LIKE A FUGITIVE INSTEAD OF FACING THE MOB EYE TO EYE AS WAS HIS DESIRE IN LIFE. EVEN THIS HE WAS WILLING TO DO IF IT ADDED TO THE FURTHERANCE OF THE GOSPEL.

(AS WE HAVE VISITED WITH MISSIONARIES ON THE FIELD, I HAVE BEEN REMINDED REPEATEDLY OF HOW THEY HAVE SUFFERED AND SACRIFICED BECAUSE OF CHRIST. (1) RELATE THE PROLONGED SICKNESS OF THE BAERS IN SO. MEXICO. (2) DON HARE AND THE LOSS OF HIS SON IN BRAZIL. (3) RAY PIERSON AND THE LOSS OF HIS SON IN KOREA.

(4) WILLIE BRADLE AND THE LOSS OF EVERYTHING IN ANGOLA. (5) MEL PITTMAN AND THE SCHOOLING PROBLEMS IN GAMBIA - THE RETURN OF THEIR CHILDREN TO THE UNITED STATES. (6) DICK MATTHEWS SAME PROBLEM IN BRAZIL. THERE IS A PRICE TO PAY TO SERVE CHRIST. MANY - MOST ARE SIMPLY UNWILLING TO PAY IT. PAUL WAS WILLING.

ROBERT K. SPRADLING MAY 16, 1982

"GRACE ENOUGH"

II CORINTHIANS 12:1-10

THE WORD GRACE APPEARS SIX TIMES IN THE FOUR STANZA IN THE HYMN AMAZING GRACE. "TWAS GRACE THAT TAUGHT MY HEART TO FEAR AND GRACE MY FEARS RELIEVED, HOW PRECIOUS DID THAT GRACE APPEAR THE HOUR I FIRST BELIEVED. THROUGH MANY DANGERS, TOILS AND SNARES, I HAVE ALREADY COME; TIS GRACE HATH BROUGHT ME SAFE THUS FAR, AND GRACE WILL LEAD ME HOME." THE BIBLE SPEAKS OF GRACE TO SAVE - EPH. 2:8-9, GRACE TO BE STRONG - II TIM. 2:1: "THOU THEREFORE, MY SON, BE STRONG IN THE GRACE THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS." GRACE TO SING - "LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU RICHLY IN ALL WISDOM; TEACHING AND ADMONISHING ONE ANOTHER IN PSALMS AND HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS, SINGING WITH GRACE IN YOUR HEARTS TO THE LORD." (COL. 3:16) IN OUR TEXT TODAY THE WORD GRACE IS ATTACHED TO THE WORD SUFFICIENCY. GOD'S GRACE IS SUFFICIENT, AMPLE AND ENOUGH FOR OUR EVERY NEED. THE PASSAGE BEFORE US SUGGESTS THREE AREAS WHERE GOD'S GRACE IS ENOUGH FOR THE BELIEVER'S NEED:

I. GRACE FOR LIFE'S EXPERIENCES - VERSES 1-6

(Emergencies?)

THESE VERSES TAKE US INTO THE DEEPEST MOST SECRET AND SACRED SIDE OF PAUL'S SPIRITUAL LIFE. TO THOSE AT CORINTH WHO BOASTED OF THEIR RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES, PAUL RELATES AN INCIDENT WHICH HAD HAPPENED TO HIM FOURTEEN YEARS PREVIOUSLY AND TO DATE HE HAD SAID NOTHING ABOUT IT. THE MAN IS UNDOUBTEDLY PAUL HIMSELF. IT INVOLVED BEING TAKEN TO A PLACE CALLED BOTH THE THIRD HEAVEN AND PARADISE. THE WORD PARADISE COMES FROM A PERSIAN WORD WHICH MEANS A WALLED GARDEN OR A ROYAL PARK. IT WAS USED TO REFER TO A PLACE OF HAPPINESS FOR THE RIGHTOUS IN CONTRAST TO THE PLACE OF PUNISHMENT FOR THE WICKED. JESUS USED THE SAME WORD WHEN HE SPOKE TO THE THIEF ON THE CROSS AS A TERM OF

COMFORT TO A DYING MAN. (LUKE 23-43) ONE COMMENTATOR SUGGESTS THAT WHEN A PERSION KING WISHED TO CONFER A SPECIAL HONOR UPON SOMEONE WHO WAS SPECIALLY NEAR AND DEAR TO HIM HE MADE HIM A COMPANION OF THE GARDEN AND GAVE HIM RIGHTS AND PRIVELIGES TO WALK IN THE ROYAL GARDENS AS AN INTIMATE COMPANION OF THE KING. PAUL, JESUS' TRUSTED AND TESTED SERVANT WAS GIVEN A PREVIEW OF HEAVEN. WHERE AND WHEN THIS TOOK PLACE EVEN PAUL DID NOT KNOW. THE THIRD HEAVEN IS THE ABODE OF GOD.

(1) CLOUDS
(2) SKY AND STARS
(3) THE ABODE OF GOD

(Scripture Cont Friends)

THERE ARE SOME INCREDIBLE FEATURES ABOUT THIS EXPERIENCE NOT THE LEAST OF WHICH IS THAT PAUL SAID ABSOLUTELY NOTHING ABOUT IT FOR 14 YEARS! CAN YOU IMAGINE A SPEECHLESS PREACHER! THINK OF THIS GREAT EXPERIENCE, ONE OF THE GREATEST IN PAUL'S LIFE AND HE COULDN'T TALK ABOUT IT. WHAT HE SAW DEFIED HUMAN EXPERIENCE AND EXPLANATION! TO THE CORINTHIANS WHO GLORIED IN THEIR RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES, PAUL COULD SPEAK WITH AUTHORITY ABOUT THE KIND OF EXPERIENCE THEY COULD NOT DUPLICATE OR FANTHOM. THIS PASSAGE SHOULD TEACH SEVERAL THINGS ABOUT RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES

(1) MEN SOMETIME GLORY IN EXPERIENCES INSTEAD OF CHRIST. NOTICE THAT PAUL DID NOT GLORY IN WHAT HAD HAPPENDED TO HIM EVEN THOUGH IT WAS UNIQUE. PAUL DESIRED THAT HE BE KNOWN FOR HIS GOSPEL MINISTRY AND NOT HIS RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES. WE LIVE IN A TIME WHEN EXPERIENCES HAVE BECOME PRIMARY AND DOCTRINE SECONDARY. TO THE CARNALLY MINDED THE EXPERIENCE IS EVERYTHING. TO SPEAK IN TONGUES, TO BE HEALED, TO SHOUT, TO BE SLAIN IN THE SPIRIT ARE EXPERIENCES WHICH SOME FOLK SEEK, BUT WITHOUT SCRIPTURAL ENCOURAGEMENT. THINK ABOUT PAUL IN TODAYS WORLD IF HE SPOKE OF HIS EXPERIENCE HE WOULD HAVE BEEN ON SEVERAL TV SHOWS, HE COULD HAVE SOLD BOOKS AND GONE ON TOUR FROM CITY TO CITY TELLING OF HIS INCREDIBLE

UNSPEAKABLE EXPERIENCE IN PARADISE. PLEASE NOTICE HE DID NONE OF THESE THINGS WHICH APPEAL TO THE FLESH. SOMETIMES FOLK ARE MORE TAKEN UP WITH THE BLESSING THAN THE BLESSER. (2) OUR EXPERIENCES WITH THE LORD ARE IMPORTANT BUT THEY MAY CHANGE, FADE AND FAIL, BUT THE WORD OF GOD REMAINS. GOD'S GRACE IS ADEQUATE TO PROVIDE THE BELIEVER WITH SPIRITUAL STABILITY AND EQUILIBRIUM IN AN ATMOSPHERE THAT GLORIES IN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES.

II. GRACE FOR LIFE'S HANDICAPS - vs. 7-8

THERE WERE DANGERS ATTACHED TO SUCH AN OVERWHELMING EXPERIENCE. PAUL COULD HAVE BEEN RENDERED USELESS IN CHRIST'S SERVICE IF HE BECAME TOO PUFFED UP ABOUT HIS PARADISE ADVENTURE. FOR THAT REASON PAUL SAID: "LEST I SHOULD BE EXHALTED ABOVE MEASURE" THAT SIMPLY MEANS IN ORDER TO KEEP PAUL FROM BEING OVER-ELATED OR LIFTED UP OR PUFFED UP GOD UNDERTOOK SOME EQUALIZING FACTORS TO KEEP HIS FEET ON THE GROUND. SANDERS SAID IT WELL WHEN HE SAID: "NOTHING SO TENDS TO INFLATE A MAN WITH A SENSE OF HIS OWN IMPORTANCE AS THE POSSESION OF GREAT GIFTS OF INTELECT AND THE ENJOYMENT OF SPECIAL AND UNUSUAL EXPERIENCES. AND THERE IS NOTHING WHICH MORE SURELY DISQUALIFIES FROM SPIRITUAL USEFULNESS THAN SPIRITUAL PRIDE." THE VERY EXPERIENCE GIVEN TO HIM BY THE LORD COULD HAVE ISOLATED HIM FROM THE PEOPLE HE SOUGHT TO REACH AND LEST THAT HAPPEN GOD TOOK STEPS OR SAFE-GUARDS TO PROTECT PAUL AND THE LORD'S WORK. THE TERM GIVEN IS VERY INTERESTING. ONE COMMENTATOR SUGGESTS THAT IT MEANS TO BE GIVEN AS A FAVOR. ONCE AGAIN IN SCRIPTURE WE HAVE THE RELATIONSHIP OF GOD IN HIS PERMISSIVE WILL USING OR PERMITTING SATAN TO AFFLICT THE SAINTS. SATAN SOUGHT TO SIFT PETER, BUT THE LORD PRAYED FOR HIM. SATAN SOUGHT TO DESTROY JOB, BUT GOD LIMITED THE EXTENT OF SATANTIC AFFLICTION. THE WORD "THORN IN THE FLESH" REFERS TO SOME KIND OF PHYSICAL INFIRMITY WHICH

GOD PERMITTED, THAT WAS A CONSTANT SOURCE OF IRRITATION AND HANDICAP TO PAUL. NO ONE REALLY KNOWS WHAT THAT LIMITATION WAS, WHETHER IT WAS EYE TROUBLE, AS A RESULT OF THE BLINDNESS AT HIS CONVERSION AND FROM WHICH HE MIGHT NEVER HAVE RECOVERED FULLY. (COMPARE GAL. 4:15, GAL. 6:11) SOME SUGGEST IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN MALERIA, EPILEPSY TO MENTION BUT A FEW SUGGESTIONS. WHATEVER IT WAS, IT HUMILIATED, HURT AND HINDERED PAUL'S PHYSICAL STRENGTH. THE WORD BUFFET IS A WORD USED TO DESCRIBE STRIKING SOMEONE WITH THE FIST OR KNUCKLES. THE WORD THRICE SHOWS THE INTENSITY OF PAUL'S CONCERN FOR ITS REMOVAL. WE TEND TO LOOK UPON HANDICAPS AS HINDERANCES AND HURTS, BUT GOD SEES IN THEM HELPS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF SERVICE AND MINISTRY. GOD USES PHYSICAL AFFLICTIONS TO BRING GOOD THINGS INTO OUR LIVES. PHYSICAL PAIN AND SUFFERING SOMETIMES REMINDS US OF OUR DEPENDENCE UPON GOD AND IT REMOVES US FROM THE REALM SELF-CONFIDENCE AND SPIRITUAL PRIDE TO THAT OF DEPENDENCE UPON HIM. FEW PEOPLE HAVE PERCEIVED BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF SUFFERING IN ITS PROPER SETTING AS HAS JONI. IN HER BOOK A STEP FURTHER SHE SAYS: "I SOMETIMES SHUDDER TO THINK WHERE I WOULD BE TODAY IF I HAD NOT BROKEN MY NECK. I COULDN'T SEE AT FIRST WHY GOD WOULD POSSIBLY ALLOW IT, BUT I SURE DO NOW. HE HAS GOTTEN SO MUCH MORE GLORY THROUGH MY PARALYSIS THAN THROUGH MY HEALTH." TO BE SURE, SHE SOUGHT THE LORD'S HEALING AS PEOPLE SOUGHT TO HAVE HER HEALED, BUT THIS WAS NOT IN GOD'S WISE PROVIDENCE AND SHE HELD NO BITTERNESS IN HER HEART. TESTIMONIES ABOUND IN FAMILIES WHERE HANDICAPED CHILDREN ARE. INSTEAD OF BEING A BURDEN THESE PEOPLE BECOME A GREAT BLESSING TO A FAMILY. I HAVE READ SEVERAL TESTIMONIES OF PARENTS WHO TOLD HOW HANDICAPPED PEOPLE IN THE HOME HAVE DRAWN THE FAMILY TOGETHER WITH A SENSE OF COMMON PURPOSE AND LOVE NOTHING COULD DO. I AM IMPRESSED IN THIS PASSAGE THAT PAUL IN HIS AFFLICTION DID NOT ASK, WHY? IT

IS A MARK OF ENORMOUS SPIRITUAL MATURITY TO RECOGNIZE GOD'S WORKING WITHOUT WHINNING, COMPLAINING AND BLAMING GOD. PACKER IN HIS BOOK ENTITLED, KNOWING GOD SUGGESTS THAT WHEN ONE IS DRIVING ALONG A CROOKED NARROW ROAD HE IS NOT PREOCCUPIED WITH ASKING WHY THE ROAD IS CROOKED AND WHY IT HASN'T BEEN FIXED. WHY THIS AND WHY THAT? TO DRIVE WELL, HE KEEPS HIS EYE ON THE ROAD AHEAD OF HIM ANTICIPATING WHAT MIGHT BE AHEAD AND CONTINUES ON HIS JOURNEY. HE SUGGESTS THAT MANY OF US LIVE IN A DREAM WORLD WITH OUR HEAD IN THE CLOUDS AND OUR FEET ON THE GROUND, BUT WE NEVER SEE THE WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE AS IT REALLY IS. THE POET SAID AS FOLLOWS: "WE ASK FOR STRENGTH THAT WE MIGHT ACHIEVE; WE ARE MADE WEAK THAT WE MIGHT OBEY. WE ASK FOR HEALTH THAT WE MAY DO GREATER THINGS, WE ARE GIVEN INFIRMITY THAT WE MAY DO BETTER. WE ASK FOR POWER THAT WE MAY WIN THE PRAISE OF MEN: WE ARE GIVEN WEAKNESS THAT WE MAY FEEL OUR NEED OF GOD. WE ASK FOR ALL THINGS THAT WE MAY ENJOY LIFE; WE ARE GIVEN LIFE THAT WE MAY ENJOY ALL THINGS." (A FORMER PRESIDENT OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY WAS BORN WITH A SERIOUS FACIAL DISFIGUREMENT AND NOT MUCH COULD BE DONE TO CORRECT IT AT THAT TIME. WHEN HE LEARNED THAT MEDICAL SCIENCE COULD DO LITTLE TO CORRECT HIS DISFORMITY BY HIS TESTIMONY IT WAS THE DARKEST HOUR OF HIS LIFE. IT WAS THEN THAT HIS MOTHER SAID: "MY SON, IT IS NOT POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO GET RID OF THIS HANDICAP. WE HAVE CONSULTED THE BEST SURGEONS, AND THEY SAY THAT NOTHING CAN BE DONE. BUT IT IS POSSIBLE FOR YOU, WITH GOD'S HELP TO GROW A MIND AND SOUL SO BIG THAT PEOPLE WILL FORGET TO LOOK AT YOUR FACE.") PAUL WAS SUCH A GREAT SOUL THAT PEOPLE FORGOT HIS IMFIRMITY AND HIS UNACCEPTABLE PHYSICAL APPEARANCE IN THE LIGHT OF HIS OF HIS ENORMOUS SPIRITUAL GRACE AND CHRISTIAN MATURITY.

III. GRACE FOR LIFE'S WEAKNESS - vs. 9-10

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE WORLD IS THAT THE SPOILS BELONG TO THE STRONG. HOWEVER, IN THE WORD OF GOD THERE IS A SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLE THAT GOD USES ONLY THOSE WHO ARE WEAK. OUR PROBLEM IS NOT THAT WE ARE TOO WEAK, BUT WE ARE TOO STRONG FOR GOD. (COMPARE I COR. 1:26-28) IT WAS NOT UNTIL JACOB WAS CRIPPLED THAT MEMORABLE NIGHT AS RECORDED IN GEN. 32:24FF THAT HIS NAME WAS CHANGED FROM JACOB TO ISRAEL. IT WAS A LIFE CHANGING EXPERIENCE WHEN HE STOPPED FIGHTING AND STARTED CLINGING TO GOD. PAUL WAS A MAN OF ENORMOUS NATURAL ABILITY. HE HAD GIFTS OF THE MIND THAT WERE STAGGERING. HOWEVER, PAUL NEW SOMETHING MANY OF US HAVE NOT REALIZED AND THAT IS EVEN THE GREATLY GIFTED ARE USELESS IN THE SERVICE OF GOD UNTIL WEANED FROM OUR OWN RESOURCES AS A SOURCE OF POWER. GOD [redacted] USES HUMAN WEAKNESS AS A BACK DROP TO DISPLAY HIS POWER. SOMEONE HAS SAID: "NOTHING CAN DEFEAT A CHRISTIAN OR A CHURCH THAT TAKES NOT ITS STRENGTH, BUT ITS WEAKNESS AND OFFERS IT TO GOD TO BE HIS WEAPON." THE PERSON WHO PRAYS: "LORD, HERE IS MY HUMAN WEAKNESS AND I DEDICATE IT TO YOUR GLORY" HAS TAKEN THE FIRST STEP ALONG THE PATH OF SPIRITUAL VICTORY. THINK OF THE MANY BIBLE REFERENCES WHERE GOD HAS TAKEN PHYSICAL WEAKNESS AND USED IT AS A WEAPON. MOSES AND HIS ROD OF POWER. GIDEON'S 300 AND JOSHUA'S MARCHING AROUND JERICHO. THESE WERE ALL WEAK INEFFICIENT MEN UNTIL GOD STEPPED IN AND MADE THE DIFFERENCE. THIS PRINCIPLE DOES NOT MAKE SENSE IN THE NATURAL WORLD, BUT IT IS THE ONLY WAY GOD CHOOSES TO OPERATE. THE TERM IS IS SIGNIFICANT IN OUR TEXT. AN ENGLISH PREACHER NAMED WEBB - PEPLOE WAS A YOUNG MINISTER WHEN ONE OF HIS CHILDREN DIED SUDDENLY. WHEN HE RETURNED FROM THE FUNERAL HE FOUND HIS WAY TO HIS STUDY AND IN MIND STRICKEN GRIEF HE

IN PRAYER BEGGED FOR GOD'S SUFFICIENT GRACE FOR HIS HOUR OF SORROW. TO HIS DISMAY NO COMFORT CAME TO HIS TROUBLED HEART AND THE TEARS CONTINUED TO FLOW. WHEN HE PICKED UP THE BIBLE HE READ IT MEANINGLESSLY FOR THERE WAS NO MESSAGE NO MATTER WHERE HE TURNED. AFTER A PERIOD OF TIME HE OPENED TO THIS PASSAGE AND FOR THE FIRST TIME HE SAW ONE WORD LIFTED FROM THE TEXT. THAT WORD WAS IS. HE RECALLED THAT HE HAD BEEN ASKING GOD FOR SUFFICIENT GRACE WHEN ALL THE TIME GOD'S GRACE WAS THERE AND WHAT GOD WAS ASKING HIM TO DO WAS APPROPRIATE IT AND ACT UPON IT. GOD'S GRACE IS AVAILABLE, ADEQUATE AND ATTAINABLE WHATEVER YOUR AN MY SPIRITUAL HAPPENS TO BE. IF YOU ARE SAD GOD'S GRACE CAN PUT SINGING IN THE SOUL. IF YOU ARE WEAK GOD'S GRACE CAN MAKE YOU STRONG. IF YOU ARE LOST GOD'S GRACE CAN SAVE. SIMPLE SPIRITUAL FORMULA IS TO STOP TRYING AND START TRUSTING. THE WORD GRACE LITERALLY MEANS UNMERITED FAVOR. IT IS SOMETHING GOD GIVES FOR OUR NEED THAT WE DO NOT EARN OR MERIT. OUR SUBJECT TODAY IS GRACE ENOUGH. GOD'S SUPPLY IS ENOUGH, BUT YOU MUST TRUST HIM TO DO WHAT HE SAYS HE WANTS TO DO. LET HIM DO IT!

ROBERT K. SPRADLING MAY 30, 1982

"TO SPEND AND BE SPENT"

II CORINTHIANS 12:14-13:1-10

(RELATE STORY ABOUT TWO LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL PLAYERS. THE BATTER, THE LARGER OF THE TWO. THE SMALLER BOY PITCHING DID NOT GET A TURN AT BAT. THE PITCHING AND FIELDING CONTINUED WITH NO CHANGE. THE ANSWER HAD TO BE THAT THE SMALLER OF THE TWO BOYS WAS SO DELIGHTED TO BE PLAYING BASEBALL THAT HE DID NOT THINK ABOUT WHAT WAS FAIR, HE ONLY WANTED TO PLAY. PAUL'S MISSIONS PHILOSOPHY WAS TO GIVE OF HIMSELF WITHOUT REGARD TO PERSONAL SACRIFICE OR EXPENSE. WHEN PAUL WROTE TO THE CARNAL CORINTHIANS HE USED MONETARY TERMS TO SPEAK OF HIS DEDICATION TO CHRIST. PAUL'S SERVICE FOR CHRIST AND THE CORINTHIANS WAS ONE OF UNSELFISHNESS OF EXPENDING EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL ENERGY UNTIL ALL RESERVES HAD BEEN EXPENDED. PAUL KNEW THAT THERE ARE SOME DEBTS IN LIFE WHICH ONE MAY SETTLE WITH A SUM OF MONEY, BUT THERE ARE OTHER DEBTS TO HUMANITY WHICH MONEY CANNOT SETTLE. IN THE FOLLOWING VERSES PAUL SPEAKS OF SOME PRINCIPLES WHICH NEED TO BE UNDERSTOOD IN SERVING THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

Rom. 1:

I. SERVICE FOR CHRIST IS OFTEN UNAPPRECIATED BY THOSE WHO ARE BEING SERVED - 12:14-19

THE CORINTHIANS STEADFASTLY RESISTED PAUL'S AUTHORITY. THEY SOUGHT TO DISCREDIT PAUL AND HE REWARDED SUCH DISOBEDIANCE AND RESISTANCE BY SACRIFICIAL SERVICE. PAUL WOULD NOT BURDEN THE CHURCH WITH HIS EXPENSES. WHEN HE CAME TO CORINTH HE REFUSED HONORIUM OR MONEY OF ANY KIND FOR HIS SERVICE. THIS IS NOT TRUE OF THE FALSE TEACHERS. PAUL WOULD NOT ACCEPT THEIR MONEY! IT WAS NOT THEIR GOODS HE DESIRED, BUT THEIR GOOD! LENSKI SAYS

THAT THE FALSE TEACHERS CARED ONLY FOR THE WOOL AND NOT FOR THE SHEEP. (PAUL'S ATTITUDE WAS A FAR CRY FROM REV. AL, REV. SUN-MOON WHO INDEED HAS BECOME A STAR! OR MUCH OF THE RADIO AND TELEVISION "PITCH" WHICH ABOUNDS THROUGHOUT OUR LAND AND INDEED THE WORLD. ONE IS REMINDED OF THE "GEHAZI SYNDROME" AS RECORDED IN II KINGS 5). SIMPLY STATED, THE CORINTHIANS MEANT MORE TO PAUL THAN WHAT THEY HAD AND HOW MUCH THEY COULD GIVE. AS A MATTER OF FACT, PAUL'S LOVE WAS NOT RETURNED. IT IS ONE THING TO LOVE PEOPLE AND HAVE THAT LOVE RETURNED, BUT WHEN IT IS MISUNDERSTOOD AND CRITICIZED IT TAKES GRACE TO CONTINUE ON.

PAUL'S ASSOCIATES WERE CUT FROM THE SAME CLOTH AS HE. TITUS IS MENTIONED EIGHT TIMES IN II CORINTHIANS. AS A MATTER OF FACT, MORE IS SAID ABOUT HIM IN CORINTHIANS THAN IN ANY OTHER BOOKS INCLUDING THE ONE WRITTEN TO HIM. TITUS WAS AN INTIMATE COLLEAGUE AND COMPANION OF PAUL IN THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY. TITUS WAS ENTRUSTED TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM OF IMMORALITY IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH AND APPARENTLY WAS SUCCESSFUL IN DOING SO TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT HIS REPORT BROUGHT JOY TO PAUL'S HEART. SUCH MEN WHO DEAL WITH DELICATE AND DIFFICULT PROBLEMS WITH TACT AND SKILL ARE RARE INDEED! THE SAD IRONY IS THAT THE CORINTHIANS WERE SO TAKEN UP WITH FALSE TEACHERS THAT THEY DID NOT RECOGNIZE THE WORTH EITHER OF PAUL OR TITUS! PAUL CONCLUDES THIS SECTION BY SUMMING UP HIS MINISTRY AS ONE OF EDIFICATION. THIS WORD CHARACTERIZES A BIBLICAL MINISTRY. IT MAYBE CORRECT AND DISIPLINARY IN NATURE, BUT IT IS DESIGNED TO BUILD UP AND NOT TEAR DOWN THE SAINTS. REMARK CONCERNING SARA KINNISON REGARDING SPRING FORK BAPTIST CHURCH.

THE WORD EDIFY MEANS TO BUILD AND IT IS THE WORD PICTURE OF BUILDING A HOUSE WHICH WE SOMETIMES CALL AN EDIFICE. THIS SAME ROOT WORD IS USED BY OUR LORD IN MATTHEW 16:13 WHEN HE TALKS ABOUT BUILDING HIS CHURCH.

CHRISTIAN LIFE REQUIRES PROPER GROWTH, DEVELOPMENT AND MATURITY. WE START A PROPER FOUNDATION AND KEEP ON BUILDING ON THAT FOUNDATION THROUGHOUT LIFE. THAT PROCESS IS CALLED EDIFICATION.

II. SERVICE FOR CHRIST IS OFTEN HINDERED BY UNCONFESSED SINS - 12:20-21

THE CORINTHIANS WERE ENCOURAGED TO START CLEANING UP THE SPIRITUAL MESS IN THEIR CHURCH BEFORE PAUL ARRIVED. HOWEVER, PAUL DID NOT FLINCH OR TURN ASIDE FROM DEALING WITH MATTERS OF SIN HEADON. THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH WAS LIKE MANY OTHERS WHERE THERE IS A DESPAIRITY BETWEEN KNOWING OR BEING FAMILIAR WITH BIBLE PRESCEPTS, BUT FORGETTING BIBLE PRACTICES. MANY ACCORDING TO THE TEXT, HAD SINNED AND HAD NOT REPENTED. LEFT ALONE TO FESTER THE SITUATION COULD ONLY GROW WORSE. THE SINS RAMPANT IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH WERE STRIFE. THIS SPEAKS OF PEOPLE WHO ARE FIGHTING OVER POSITION AND PRIVELEGE. ENVY THE DESIRE OR SPIRIT TO HAVE WHAT IS NOT OURS TO HAVE AND BEGRUDGES OTHER PERSONS FOR WHAT THEY POSSESS. OUTBURSTS OF ANGER - TEMPER TANTRUMS, OUTBURSTS AND EXPLOSIONS.... WHISPERINGS - THE USAGE OF MALICIOUS GOSSIP, AND SLANDEROUS STORIES WHISPERED IN ANOTHER'S EAR AS A SPICY TALE TO DESTROY ANOTHER PERSONS CHARACTER. THE WORD SWELLINGS MEANS CONCEIT. PEOPLE WHO MAGNIFY THEMSELVES INSTEAD OF THE OFFICE AND RESPONSIBILITY THEY HOLD. THE WORD TUMULTS MEANS DISORDER. THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH WAS DEMOCRATIC IN NATURE, BUT IT WAS NOT A PLACE WHERE EVERY MAN HAD A RIGHT TO SAY AND DO AS HE PLEASED. IT WAS A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE ENTERED INTO THE VOLUNTARY RESTRICTIONS LAID DOWN IN THE WORD OF GOD. IT SUGGESTS INTER-DEPENDENCY AND TOGETHERNESS, NOT EVERY MAN GOING HIS OWN WAY. ON TOP OF THESE SOCIAL SINS PAUL LISTS SEXUAL SINS IN VERSE 21.

THE CORINTHIANS LIVED IN A SOCIETY WHICH LOOKED UPON ADULTRY AND FORNICATION AS A NATURAL AND EXPECTED THING FOR MEN IN THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE. THERE WAS LITTLE OR NO RESTRAINT AND NO SENSE OF DECENCY AND RESPONSIBILITY TO GOD. THESE THINGS REQUIRED DEPENDENCE. (THE STORY IS TOLD OF A PASTOR OF A CHURCH NEAR A COLLEGE CAMPUS WHO ASKED AN ENGLISH TEACHER AT THE COLLEGE TO SUGGEST THE THREE MOST DIFFICULT WORDS IN THE BIBLE TO SAY. AFTER CONSIDERABLE STUDY, SHE SUGGESTED THESE THREE WORDS: (1) SHIBBOLETH - JUDGES 12:6 (2) SEPULCHRE (3) MAHERSHALALHASHBAZ THE PASTOR EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR HER CONSIDERATIONS, BUT HIS REPLY WAS NONE OF THE ABOVE. THE WORDS ARE: "I HAVE SINNED!" THE CORINTHIANS COULD HAVE TAKEN A PROFITABLE PAGE OUT OF DAVID'S LIFE CONCERNING SOLUTION TO ADULTRY. ONE UNGUARDED MOMENT IN DAVID'S LIFE BROUGHT YEARS OF MISERY AND SHAME. FOR THAT YEAR DAVID STEADFASTLY REFUSED TO REPENT AND LEARNED THE BITTER LESSON THAT WHERE THERE IS NO REPENTANCE THERE IS NO FORGIVENESS! (SEE PSALM 51) HOW PEOPLE LIVING IN THIS KIND OF ATMOSPHERE WOULD HAVE THE GALL TO CRITICIZE PAUL IS BEYOND UNDERSTANDING. WE ARE ALL BLINDED TO SOME EXTENT, TO OUR OWN SIN STAINED SOULS AND SOMETIMES TURN OUR VENOM OF CRITICISM UPON THE SAINTS OF GOD IN AN ATTEMPT TO TAKE THE FOCUS OF ATTENTION FROM OURSELVES AND TO KEEP FROM DEALING WITH THE SINS WHICH DESTROY FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD. WE LIKE THE CORINTHIANS CAN RECITE 1 JOHN 1:9 BUT TO PUT IT INTO PRACTICE IS SOMETIMES A NEGLECTED RESPONSIBILITY.

III. SERVICE FOR CHRIST INVOLVES SPIRITUAL EVALUATION - 13:5FF

THE CORINTHIANS HAD BEEN PREOCCUPIED WITH EXAMINING PAUL'S CREDENTIALS AND WORTHINESS AS AN APOSTLE. NOW IT WAS TIME TO EXAMINE THEMSELVES! PAUL SUGGESTS SEVERAL TESTS

THEY SHOULD ADMINISTER:

(1) THE TEST OF GENUINE FAITH - VS. 5 THE WORD EXAMINE MEANS TO TEST OR PROVE. THE WORD REPROBATE CARRIES THE IDEA OF A COUNTERFEIT. PAUL WAS ASKING THE CORINTHIANS TO MAKE SURE THEIR FAITH WAS GENUINE. A TRUE BELIEVER NEVER RESENTS SUCH A CHALLENGE. A COUNTERFEIT ALWAYS DOES! "ARE YOU SAVED?" IS NEVER AN OFFENSIVE QUESTION TO THE TRUE BELIEVER. IF THE SINS OF 12:20-21 ARE IN THE LIFE HOW COULD ONE SAY: "I'M SAVED?" ACCORDING TO I TIMOTHY 1:2 IT IS VITAL THAT A PERSON BE A TRUE CHILD, SON OR BORN-ONE IN THE FAITH. PAUL WAS CONCERNED THAT THERE WERE COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIANS" AT CORINTH. APPEARANCE IS NOT THE TEST OF FAITH. (MATTHEW 13:36-43) APPAREL IS NOT A TEST OF FAITH. (MATTHEW 7:15) APPEAL IS NOT A TEST OF FAITH. (MATTHEW 7:21-23) A PERSON MAY BE NICE, SWEET AND TOTALLY WRONG. THE BIBLE TEACHES THAT JESUS CHRIST CAME TO SAVE US FROM SIN. ACCORDING TO TITUS 2:11-14 THE BELIEVER IS SAVED FROM ALL LAWLESSNESS AND THE COURSE OF HIS LIFE IS GODLINESS AND NOT GODLESSNESS. SAVING FAITH AND SAINTLY LIVING GO TOGETHER. IF ONE IS SAVED HIS LIFE OUGHT TO SHOW IT. (II COR. 5:17)

(2) THE TEST OF DEEDS - VS.7 THE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN SHOULD HAVE NO EVIL. THE WORD HONEST IS TRANSLATED GOOD. GOOD DEEDS ARE THE RESULT OF GOOD CREEDS.

(3) THE TEST OF TRUTH - VS. 8 THE CORINTHIANS WERE TOSSED TO AND FRO BY THE OPINIONS OF DIFFERENT MEN. LIKE THE SHIFTING SANDS OF THE TRACTLESS DESERT MEN'S OPINIONS AND PHILOSOPHIES CHANGE. THERE IS A LEGEND FROM THE MIDDLE EAST ABOUT TWO SURVEYORS WHO WERE ATTEMPTING TO DO SOME WORK IN A DESERT. THEIR MAP SHOWED CERTAIN TREES, STREAMS AND CONTOURS OF THE LAND, BUT ONE NIGHT THEY WERE CAUGHT IN A TERRIBLE STORM AND THE NEXT DAY THEY

DISCOVERED THAT THE LANDMARKS HAD EITHER BEEN BLOWN OR WASHED AWAY AND THEY WERE LOST. THE MAPS WERE USELESS. FINALLY AFTER THE EARLY EMOTION OF DESPERATION HAD PASSED AND AS THEY LOOKED AT THE STAR FILLED SKY ONE SAID WE'RE OK BECAUSE THE STARS ARE STILL THERE. THEY COULD TAKE THEIR DIRECTION NOT FROM THE LANDMARKS OF EARTH, WHICH HAD BEEN SWEPT AWAY, BUT FROM THE FIXED POSITION OF THE STARS. SO IT IS WITH GOD'S TRUTH. CORINTHIANS MUST FIX THEIR FAITH ON GOD'S TRUTH. (JOHN 8:32)