

Help for reaching our destiny in God.

The Uniqueness of the Individual

"Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12:27 KJV).

In this single verse Paul is pointing out two very basic Christian truths which must be kept in proper balance: our place in the Body of Christ and our uniqueness as individual Christians. In a day when we are seeking to fulfill the responsibilities inherent in living under spiritual authority and relating responsibly to one another, there is a danger that we may sell ourselves short as individuals. In our desire to live in covenant, we may lose sight of our own uniqueness as individuals and our own personal worth in the sight of God. Given the truth that living in tant. If either of us were lost or left out, something unique would be missing in the Body of Christ. No one else can take your place. No one else can make your contributions, nor fit in the slot uniquely designed for you.

We need to remember the Lord Jesus Christ didn't just die on the cross for the sins of mankind—He died there for *your* sins and *my* sins. He's not just the Savior of the world; He's *your* Savior and *mine*. He's not in the general redemption business; He's in the *individual* redemption business. He specifically saved you, and He specifically saved me.

Without a proper sense of self worth, without a deep and confident realization that you and I are important to God, that He loves us like we are—imperfections and all—that He created us in His image and redeemed us by His love, then we will be unable to fit properly in the unique place He has reserved for us in the Body of Christ.

We are not just "any old member" in the Body of Christ; we are "members in particular." ticular."

When my wife's father died some 14 years ago, she had an experience which gave her great comfort. In a vision, she saw a magnificent mosaic of the Body of Christ made up of a myriad of redeemed individuals, shining like beautiful multifaceted prisms, perfectly aligned with each other, held together by God's love. And then she beheld her father, *perfectly fitted into his own unique place* in the mosaic.

May God help us to understand and be confident in the principle that vision illustrates and the truth we want this issue of *New Wine* to convey: we are the Body of Christ and *members in particular*.

> Don Basham Editor



covenant involves a willingness to lay our lives down for each other, placing another's welfare ahead of our own, how are we to retain a vital awareness of our own individual worth?

First of all we need to be regularly reminded that we were created and redeemed by God who delights in variety. He deliberately made each one of us to be unique. He delighted in fashioning each of us "one of a kind." There is no one else on earth quite like you or me. That's why we are imporWithout this assurance, our service and witness to the Lord and to the rest of the Body are born out of mixed motives. Rather than issuing from the security that comes from knowing we are created intentionally by God and "accepted in the beloved," it is offered half out of the futile desire to earn God's love and grace and half out of our longing to be accepted by our brethren. Both motives fall short of the realization that by the Lord's design and intent, we are unique and precious, "members in par-

This Month

March 1981









other features

Editorial							.2	
Dear New	Wine		•			•	35	

4. Bringing Truth to Maturity by Bob Mumford

The goal of a leader is to enable individuals to stand on their own.

9. Making Decisions by John Beckett

Decision making is a daily obligation that each must effectively face.

15. Having Firm Root in Ourselves by Robert Grant

Our individual roots must grow deep in order for us to be strong and stable.

20. Your Worth as a Person by Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey

Your importance in relationship to the rest of the Body of Christ.

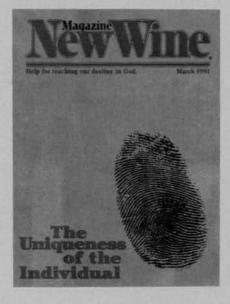
24. The Uniqueness of the Individual by Paul Petrie

A look at the boundless diversity God has created within the Body.

30. What's Wrong with Me? by Larry Christenson

The answer to one of the most common questions people ask.

Vol. 13, No. 3



magazine staff

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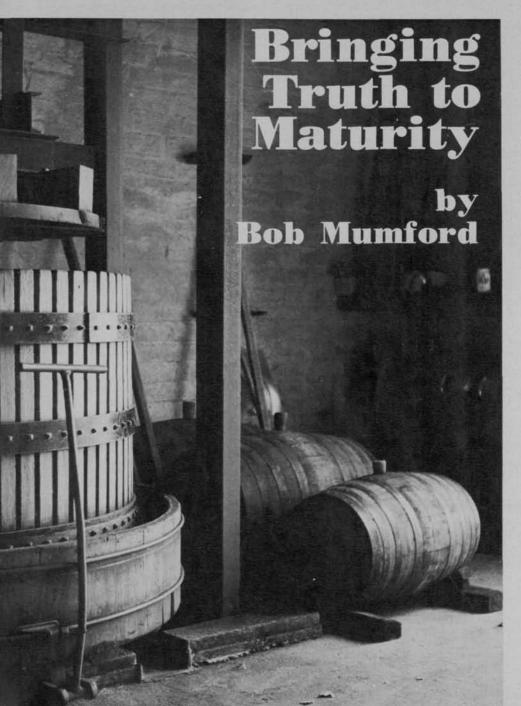
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© 1981 by Christian Growth Ministries. All rights reserved. New Wine [ISSN 0194-438X] [USPS 382-520] is published monthly, except for combined July/August issue, by Christian Growth Ministries, P.O. Box Z, Mobile, Alabama 36616. Second-class postage paid at Mobile, AL and additional mailing offices. AS LEADERS of people who are hungry for the truth, we often find ourselves frustrated when the Lord does not grant us understanding in the manner we would like. However, recently, I have found myself being almost as afraid that God *would* give me greater understanding of certain truths as I used to be that He would *not*. I am learning that truth has potential to help and harm, depending on my ability to handle it properly.

A firecracker can do little harm, but it is also of little practical use. Atomic power, however, can destroy a city or light one. The degree of potential usefulness is directly proportional to the degree of potential danger. Likewise, those spiritual truths which are ultimately the most beneficial can also do the most damage if not properly understood and applied.

In recent years, as I and some other pastoral leaders have worked to give Christians personal training and to build Christian communities, the Lord has granted us new understanding of how His authority operates among men. This



truth concerning His authority, His government, has the potential of being an immeasurable source of growth to groups of Christians; or, like explosives, it could be dangerous if misunderstood and misapplied.

Making New Wine

It will help us learn how to better apply truth if we can understand the process by which the Lord restores an understanding of various aspects of His truth to the Church. Jesus illustrates the process in the parable of the wine and wineskins.

"And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins, and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is good enough'" (Luke 5:37-39).

We can understand the wine in Jesus' parable as insight into God's life. The production of wine takes place in three steps: harvest, fermentation, and aging.

During the *harvest* the grapes are placed in large vats or presses and the pure juice is extracted from the pulp, seeds, and skins of the grapes. The juice is then placed in large vats or containers for the second step.

Fermentation is the action of yeasts which transform the grape juice into wine. It is critical that the right strain of yeast interact with the grape juice, since a good yeast will produce a sweet, mellow wine but a bad strain will produce wine which is sour and vinegary.

The fermentation process produces carbon dioxide which exerts pressure on the container. The container holding the fermenting wine must either be flexible enough to stretch with the expanding gas or the gas must occasionally be allowed to escape, otherwise the container will burst.

Though the wine-making

process is technically completed with the end of fermentation, the new wine is still not totally fit for consumption. New wine has a strong, tannic flavor and aroma because of residual impurities and tends to go to the drinker's head faster than mellowed wine, making him dizzy.

To make the wine enjoyable and palatable, it must be *aged*. During the aging process, the wine is allowed to sit while the impurities, called "lees," settle to the bottom. Several times during the aging process the wine is drawn off the lees, or "racked," into another vessel for more of the impurities to settle. Removing the lees helps soften the wine to a mellow vintage which is enjoyable and less heady to the drinker

Harvest of Truth

The wine-making process offers a graphic picture of the introduction of new understanding of the truth into the people of God. Throughout history there have been great "harvests" of truth as the Lord gave fresh enlightenment concerning His ways. During the harvest the essence of what the Lord is saying is extracted from the men and the ministries through which renewed understanding has been delivered.

Following such an outpouring there is generally a period of fermentation, or upheaval and controversy. The turmoil of the fermentation process is the changing of the sweet juice of theory and vision into the potent, practical reality of application to daily life. As in the making of real wine, the nature of the yeast is the critical factor for the finished product. Scripture pictures yeast as influence: either of the kingdom of God (Matt. 13:33) or of evil (Matt. 16:6). When new insight into the truth is applied under the influence of godly men with proper motives, the vintage will be enjoyable to all who drink. However, when the truth is applied with wrong motives or improper attitudes, the results are sour, vinegary, and impalatable.

During the fermentation process the structures into which renewed recognition of the truth has been introduced undergo a period of stretching and change. Many which are inflexible end up being shattered or destroyed. Those which are flexible and open to change continue to adjust until the fermentation is completed.

Adjustment, Aging

Like new wine, however, new truth is not fully ready for consumption once controversy and upheaval begin to subside. Very often the new understanding of the truth is still harsh, dogmatic, heady, and messianic. Like wine, it must age. The impurities require some time to settle and be eliminated. The insight into the truth may go through many transitions and be poured from vessel to vessel as it interplays between groups, ministries, and churches. As the aging process continues, the insight loses its harsh flavor and becomes more balanced, less heady.

Understanding the wine-making process we can understand why Jesus would say, "No one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is good



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The Need for Balance

What has been happening in recent years concerning authority among some of us who are building communities seems to be coming of age or settling out. Much of the great fermentation and controversy has passed. The wineskins have stretched and we have learned much about applying what we have learned. Yet there have remained some things which are harsh and tannic.

We are now facing the task of sifting the unpleasant residue, of discovering practical, spiritual wisdom by trial and error. There have been certain principles which of necessity we could only grasp by practical application. In the process, we have gone down alleys which we have had to back out of, we have built some things that have had to be torn down, and we have invested in some things which have cost us dearly. Pioneering is never cheap.

Out of our experience, I believe, the new wine has begun to age. We are now seeing a greater degree of balance which is bringing health to our application of scriptural truth about Christian authority and government of the Christian community. The balance which we must attain as pastors and leaders is this: moving the group toward its goals without jeopardizing or hindering the growth of the individual believer.

For many years the Church was oriented toward the individual. Recently God has been speaking to us about the whole, the body, the community. Like scribes that have become disciples of the kingdom of heaven, we are challenged to bring forth out of our experience "things new and old" (Matt. 13:52). This new insight into the truth, balanced with all that God has said before, brings peace to our ministries.

Community and Individual

Our world is struggling between two alternatives: mindless collectivism and rugged individualism. Collectivism disregards the individual and his good; the individualist cares nothing for anyone besides himself. The gospel, however, offers us a third alternative-membership in the Body of Christ. Membership is a uniquely Christian concept. A member, or organ, is not just a part of the whole, nor is it a part unto itself. As with organs in our bodies, it is our individuality that makes us useful members of the whole. Therefore community does not benefit in the long run when community is emphasized at the expense of the individual, because this results in stagnation and the stifling of motivation. At the same time, overemphasis on individual welfare produces self-centered believers and ultimate disintegration.

The balance we must aim at is each individual member's functioning in his or her gift and placement, with the motivation being the edification of the body rather than personal profit. The paradox is that it is our willingness to live for the life of the body that ultimately develops us as individuals fulfilled in the strengths and gifts God has given us.

Vertical and Horizontal

The New Testament teaches that the believer needs both a vertical relationship with the Lord and horizontal relationships with other members of the Body of Christ. In the past we have emphasized our vertical relationship with the Lord so strongly that we have not realized our need to maintain active, harmonious relationships with other Christians. It is equally unbalanced to become so



centered on our relationship with other believers in community that we forget to adequately maintain our personal fellowship with the Lord.

An excellent explanation of the needed balance in these relationships is given by Rousas J. Rushdooney in his classic work, *The Institutes of Biblical Law:*

With respect to salvation and God's providence, Christ is the only mediator between God and man [my italics]. But God's grace moves not only directly from God to man through Christ, but also through man to man as they discharge their duties under God. The fact that salvation is entirely the work of God does not alter the reality of covenantal instruments. To deny them is to deny their status in God's order. Pastors, parents, teachers, civil authorities are God's instruments of covenant mediation [my italics] as they faithfully discharge their duties under God (compare Eph. 3:2). Protestantism has rightly upheld the exclusiveness of that mediation but it has also done harm by denving there is a mediation between men. Clearly, God's delegated authorities, spiritual and civil, which faithfully apply God's word

and God's order, mediate God's justice to evil doers as well as God's care to his own (John 21:15-17).

We must always teach, encourage, and allow time for the priestly ministry of each believer even in the press of community activities. While it is proper to teach that fellowship and God's delegated authority are sources of spiritual life, we must never allow believers to lose sight of the ultimate source of life, which is the Lord Himself. All horizontal relationships give life only as long as they are held in perspective with our vertical relationship with the Lord.

Order and Spontaneity

In the past we taught people to act as they were led by the Spirit. The result in many places was chaos. So in an effort to help people more accurately interpret the leading of the Holy Spirit and prevent mistakes in the spiritually immature, we asked people to check out their guidance with a pastor or shepherd for a confirming word. The result in many cases became a bureaucratic system which seemed to squelch the spontaneity and the joy of seeing God work.

As leaders, we must first trust our people enough to allow them to make mistakes in learning to identify the voice of the Holy Spirit. Also, discretionary authority can be taught and practiced as a balancing factor. As a believer, there are certain realms where I am secure in knowing the leading of the Holy Spirit. In other areas, however, I may need confirmation or adjustment concerning my leadings; this is especially true where others may be affected in a significant way by my actions or if I am vet a neophyte. It is one thing to prophesy, "Yea, the Lord loves you..."; it is something different to speak the word of the Lord as. "It is the Lord's will for Sam to go to Alaska.'

Discretionary authority gives me the freedom to learn the leading of the Holy Spirit in areas where mistakes will not be too injurious, while providing the necessary help and guidance in areas where I am not yet fully confident. To the degree to which peoples' lives are affected, spontaneity must be subject to order.

Balance in Communication

We cannot tell everything to everyone all the time. Inevitably there are differences in communication to those under our care, to other Christians, and to the world at large.

Failure to make distinctions in communication has caused problems regarding discipleship, authority, and submission. Some who really did not understand a shepherd's heart picked up shepherding principles and built little kingdoms, dominating and using the people of God. Some pastors have misapplied house church concepts and used them to build bigger and better programs without really understanding the church as a family, fatherhood in the Christian community, commitment, and discipleship. How many of us have taught openly from the

pulpit, "Wives, submit to your husbands," only to have an immature or insecure husband in the congregation use this truth in an unscriptural and unnatural manner?

We cannot produce disciples with mass communication techniques! Principles can be presented openly, but the application of the principles must be communicated individually by impartation of the *Spirit* of truth as well as the *concept*.

Jesus was careful what He communicated, and to whom. He never gave too much truth, and He even hid what He was doing from those who would not understand. Even within the ranks of the twelve there were levels of communication.

We really do belong to the one Body of Christ, and the Spirit of God is crying for unity. We cannot, however, use that as an excuse for indiscriminately communicating what God is doing in our lives when He may be doing something entirely different with others. In regard to those outside our own groups, we need to be careful of slang, buzz words, curealls, and practical truths which may not be applicable to others.

Balance in Authority

Without question, there have been situations where leaders have played the Holy Spirit to believers under their care, requiring a type of obedience and allegiance that only the Lord and the Scriptures have the right to demand. Subordination to God's delegated authority, while real and necessary, is not the subordination of a slave, neither does it involve compulsion or fear. While subordination of the wife to the husband is "in everything," it can be absolute in nothing.

Charles Hodges in his book Ephesians deals with this balance accurately and succinctly: "Spiritual authority means we are not subject to that authority in 'some things' and 'independent' in others. The Bible teaches that the *extent* of spiritual authority extends over all, but is *limited* in all—limited by the nature of the relationship and the higher authority of God and His word. So long as our allegiance to God is preserved and our obedience to man is made part of our obedience to Him, we retain our liberty and our integrity."

Even though the Lord has spoken to us plainly about respect, submission, and honor toward those in authority in the Church, we must also recognize that leadership is limited by the Word of God:

First, Christian leadership is not arbitrary or unilateral. The standard to which a man points those under his care is not his own but that of God's law.

Second, delegated spiritual authority is not soteriological, it is governmental. A leader can never take the place of the Lord Jesus as savior, but he is anointed by the Lord to bring oversight, protection, direction and correction.

Third, the goal of leadership is not the production of mindless robots. True biblical leadership builds believers who are capable of taking responsibility for themselves, their families, and each other. We are to lead people away from dependence on our leadership and toward personal responsibility and a deeper walk with the Lord.

Fourth, biblical authority is never taken, it is given. No leader should ever take more authority in the life of one of his charges than he is given by that believer.

Fifth, no leader should require anything that is unscriptural, biblically immoral, illegal, or against the dictates of the individual believer's conscience.

In striking a balance between the freedom to appeal and obedience to authority, we must realize we are striving to produce an attitude of obedience, not mechanical responses to commands. A desire to obey the Lord from the heart may be the motivation for a believer's questioning or appealing what he or she is told. At the same time, it is our great challenge to exercise the "obedience muscle" of those under our care by touching attitudes of self-will, rebellion, and stubbornness. And we must allow a freedom of expression without forcing leaders to continually explain, justify, and make necessary decisions in the atmosphere of a town meeting.

Absolutes and Variables

Derek Prince once pointed out that we have a tendency to make absolutes out of principles regarding which the Bible allows variation; for instance, the structure of church government, the degree of authority a man desires in his own life, certain matters of conscience on which the Bible is not specific, and certain applications of the gifts of the Spirit. However, we must recognize that there are certain things which we must require if a group or fellowship is to maintain unity of purpose and direction: for example, we will have our meetings on Sunday afternoon.

Though it is right to require certain things for the proper growth and operation of the whole, we can never make absolute that to which the Bible does not give absolute form. We can never make our functional requirements absolutes in terms of sin, salvation, or maturity in a man's walk with the Lord. Neither can we make them absolutes in terms of our fellowship with other members of the Body of Christ. There are a few things which I understand the Bible to absolutely require for fellowship, for example: belief in the Scripture as the absolute rule of faith and practice, the deity of Christ, salvation by grace, and so on. There are also certain moral absolutes which are issues of fellowship and sin within the body, for example: adultery,

homosexual behavior, theft, etc.

Balance in this realm seems to consist of allowing other brethren the maturity to walk in the dictates of their own conscience in their relationship with the Lord, without our feeling that we have a higher way or have heard more from God than they have.

Principles and Persons

Our pastoral goal is to develop a people who will live by the principles of the New Testament regardless of personal feelings. We have been wallowing in a sea of subjectivity, and it is time to train a people who are covenantally bound to obedience to God's word without regard for personal blessing and advantage. The demand in our generation is for believers who are more concerned with covenant than convenience, and who will not follow the demands of the New Testament only when they have a personal invitation from the Holy Spirit to do so.

In our apprehension of this goal, however, we are liable to forget that the Lord is more concerned with the person than with the principle. There is something in our makeup that uses the Bible *against* people rather than *for* them. Men who have given their following the initiative of the Holy Spirit before we touch a man's life.

After Lazarus died Jesus was not overly anxious to raise him; in fact, He waited two days. He wanted to be sure the issues were clear, and then He went only after He had the whole matter settled with His Father (John 11:41-42).

Christ-like leadership has as much to do with how we get people to the desired goal as it does with getting them there. An overemphasis on principles puts people in boxes and treats them all alike. Jesus dealt with each situation individually while still satisfying the rule book. When He encountered the woman taken in adultery, there was a scriptural goal in mind: the woman had to be stopped from sinning. The Pharisees would stone her; that would cure the problem and satisfy the principle. Jesus, however, chose to deal with her as a person and accomplished the same end.

It is our weighty challenge, as those who have been given watch over the people of God, to maintain an uncompromising scriptural standard of life, fellowship, and conduct without destroying people in the process of saving them.

The new wine is aging without, I trust, the quality of the vintage

Our pastoral goal is to develop a people who will live by the principles of the New Testament regardless of personal feelings.

lives in service of the truth and have suffered for it have a difficult time not pressing their principles on people "for their own good."

We can reemphasize a principle day after day saying, "Get it together!" and expecting our people to overcome in six weeks weaknesses which may have taken us six years to outgrow. Instead we need a sensitivity to what I call "masterful inactivity." We must learn to wait until we know we are being compromised. There are many wise men who have been watching all that is happening to see if the harvest will mellow or if it will sour and be cast aside. There is already abundant evidence that many, who have waited to see if the principles of authority that we have held would find biblical balance and sufficient mellowness, are now embracing and receiving these principles with joy.



Making Decisions by John Beckett

JUST TWO WEEKS prior to the 1980 Presidential election, the voting bloc labeled "undecided" represented nearly one fourth of the voters in key industrial states.¹ Many voters were undecided even as they walked into polling booths, hoping for some last-minute flash

of inspiration as they reached for the lever that would determine national leadership for the next four years.

Why were so many voters "undecided" when the presidential candidates represented such diverging views on the role of government, national defense and moral issues? Why was it so difficult to *make a decision?* The reason is simple: *making decisions is difficult.* Those "undecided" voters typify what has become a significant problem in our society—the problem of making clear, sound decisions.

Some aspects of our problems with indecisiveness are amusing. For example, the indecision you see when teenaged girls go shopping. Our two teenaged daughters will visit every single clothing store in our shopping mall looking for shoes and dresses, only to then start all over again before making a final decision. They will dress for school (which seems to take hours) and arrive at breakfast (which is downed in under two minutes), and if they feel brave enough, they will ask, "How do you like my outfit?" The slightest hesitation in giving full approval sends them scurrying back to the bedroom for anything from a minor alteration to a complete overhaul, attesting to the fact that, at least for teenaged girls, making decisions isn't easy!

But we adults aren't much better. Watch what happens the next time you go to a restaurant with a group. The "wait"-ress waits while we decide on our order. "I'll pass," I say to my friends, "you go ahead."

"I'm not quite ready either," another says.

Finally, a courageous soul takes the big plunge. "I'll have the broiled chicken with peas and mashed potatoes."

"Hey, that sounds great," I say, and then I hear my words echo around the table. The waitress gives a faint smile as she takes the order to the kitchen for eight broiled chickens, peas and mashed potatoes.

Today, businesses realize the

difficulty managers are having in making decisions, so expensive business seminars on "Decision Making" are commonly offered to address this substantial problem.

Congressmen, like businessmen, have difficulty making decisions, evidenced by some of their voting records on congressional be emotional wounds that may never heal.

Spiritually, there are indeed multitudes in the "Valley of Decision" and Satan will have done his work well if he can keep them from deciding to follow Jesus. The penalty for this indecision is literally death.

Spiritually, there are indeed multitudes in the "Valley of Decision" and Satan will have done his work well if he can keep them from deciding to follow Jesus.

issues. We are told that three out of four legislators, when they *do* vote, are not voting from principled conviction, but from their perception of what the popular position is among their electorate. We thus see our leaders, men of immense influence, being ruled by the herd because of their inability to take a firm, personal stance.

Certain governmental aspects, such as our nation's foreign policy, reflect our leaders' vacillation more than others. In a recent interview, 821 business executives were asked what word best describes our foreign policy since the Vietnam War. Seventy-three percent responded "indecisive."²

Tragically, the decision dilemma is affecting our young people as they drift into the most vital of human relationships—marriage. To avoid a decision on a life partner, they have "experimental" marriages. Commitment is nil, making the chances of marital success not much greater. In these cases, the price of indecision can



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Why Is Decision Making So Difficult Today?

The removal of absolute standards is perhaps the most obvious reason that making decisions has become so difficult today. Several generations of humanism, situation ethics, and values clarification have left us ambiguous regarding right and wrong, truth and falsehood. Our educational system has been a prime offender in contributing to this ambiguity. Even in math courses, where one would expect objectivity, certain textbooks use story problems and examples to attack traditional standards and values. Imagine the damage being inflicted on our young people by distorted textbooks and teachers whose values shift as readily as the weather. Ernest Hemingway defined morality as being "what you feel good after," and our society has embarked on a binge of this type of relativism, where we are free to act without restraint, and without accountability. Now, when a man is asked if he loves his wife, he is apt to answer with a straight face, "Compared to what?"

There are other factors which contribute to indecisiveness. The *fear of making mistakes* has increased as a factor, due to our intolerant and unforgiving society. Ask the football coach who has been fired because his team has a losing season, or the purchasing agent who is demoted when he lets his company's inventory level get too high. Our unmerciful society exacts a heavy penalty for bad decisions and failure.

During the Presidential debate before the November election, the candidates' goal was not so much to win as to avoid losing. A prevalent philosophy is that if we don't take a position—if we don't decide—we can't be shown wrong. So we have leadership by consensus, not conviction.

Another factor in our growing indecisiveness is *weakened authority structures*. As authority is weakened—whether it is parents, teachers, pastors or police—we become less secure. Where authority is healthy, a framework exists in which we can make decisions, even wrong decisions, and not suffer rejection. Strong, loving, forgiving families are the best vehicle for producing people who are confident in their ability to make wise choices.

Lastly, decision-making can be painful, for it often involves confrontation. When dad tells his voungsters that the family is going to the early church service tomorrow and everyone has to get to bed early, it would be an unusual family where there aren't a few murmers. Ours, at least, isn't the home on the range-"where seldom is heard a discouraging word and the skies are not cloudy all day." But the truth is, some matters simply need to be confronted, painful though they may be. By avoiding a firm decision, and thus not facing the issue, the matter will ultimately become more painful. Better that we make the decision, face whatever problems occur at their earliest point, pay the price of confrontation, and get the issue resolved.

The Consequence of Indecision

We have already noted some results of indecision: national malaise, wrecked marriages, unresolved conflicts, and lack of leadership. But before indecision has run its full course to produce these end results, we see a definite process of choosing which first occurs. Faced with difficult decisions, one of the alternatives we are increasingly opting for is to "cop-out," or avoid the decision all together. We "escape" by blurring our mind with drugs and alcohol, or indulging other carnal instincts, always gravitating toward the least demanding situation. We watch the T.V. program we really didn't want to watch, we eat the chocolate layer cake we were intending to resist, we buy the new stereo we can't afford. We look for the way out rather than the way through. But the problem remains unresolved, and our act of self-indulgence now adds guilt to our already turbulent emotions. We are left feeling empty, frustrated and unfulfilled.

Our reluctance to act decisively weakens our individual character and as this degeneration spreads through our society, national character will also deteriorate. U.S. Senator Sam Nunn, a member of Jerusalem taunted him as he approached the fortified city, saying, "You will not get in here; even the blind and lame can ward you off." They were certain that Jerusalem was so well sealed off that David and his men could not possibly find entry. However, the next verse modestly reports: "Nevertheless, David captured the fortress of Zion."4 Just two years ago, a mountain-climbing expert, working without scaffolding, scaled the vertical water shaft that David used in the capture. Archeologists believe this was the first time this stunning feat had been duplicated since David's troops used the shaft 3,000 years ago to recapture Zion. We need some "nevertheless" leaders like David today.

We can also learn from Queen Esther, who had to decide whether to approach her husband, King Ahasuerus, on behalf of her people, the Jews. They had been sentenced to death under a decree that the king had issued at the treacherous prompting of wicked Haman. Esther's uncle, Mordecai, encouraged her to intercede for the

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the Senate Armed Services Committee, was asked what he felt was the most serious problem in our defense posture. He replied, "I think the real problem is will and determination....If we don't have the fortitude to stay the course...we will invite the kind of confrontation all of us hope to avoid."³

Decisiveness in the Scripture

We can learn about decisiveness from the examples of the leaders in Scripture. David, after being anointed King at Hebron, decided to capture Jerusalem. The Jebusites who then occupied Jews before the King with these immortal words: "Who knows but that you have come to a royal position for such a time as this?" Esther's response was resolute: "I will go to the King, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, *I perish*." ⁵ Because of her courage and decisiveness, the way was made clear for all the Jews in the land to be spared.

Our Lord Himself is a model of decisiveness and conviction. Isaiah foretold that He would refuse evil and *choose* good, and He did.⁶ Like David, He had an appointment in Jerusalem, not to capture a Jebusite stronghold, but to conquer all the forces of hell, knowing they would inflict their full fury on Him. Isaiah prophesies of His resolute determination: "Therefore, have I set my face like flint (toward Jerusalem), and I know that I will not be put to shame."⁷ We are all the benefactors of His firm resolution to go through instead of around the problem.

As Christians we have a special responsibility to be decisive. We are stewards of the intelligence and ability He has given us, and we can only *do* His will as we come to *know* His will, and then make the choices that will enable us to walk in obedience. Let's examine how we can do the will of God by making good decisions.

How to Make Good Decisions

There is no single formula to apply in resolving problems and making decisions. But certain guidelines can give us increased confidence in the decision-making process, and remind us of crucial steps we must take in making good decisions.

The first, which may sound like double-talk, is to *decide to be decisive*. We need to set our will and resolve that we won't side-step the hard choices we all have to make. We must decide not to indulge ourselves in the temporary relief that the placebo of indecision brings.

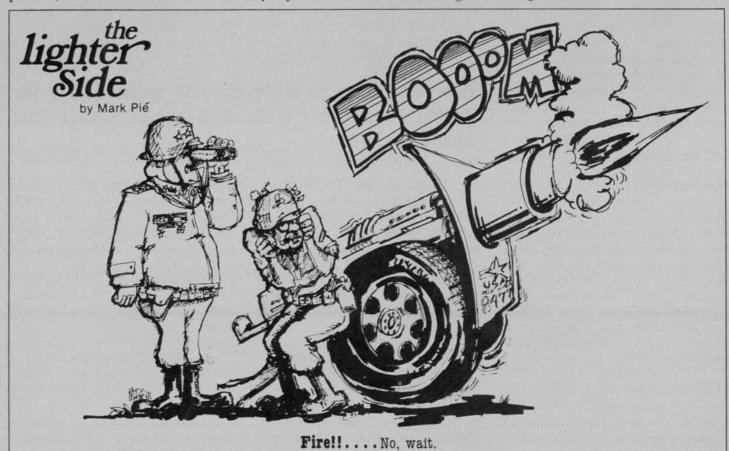
Second, having committed ourselves to reach a decision, we must seek God. There are two dimensions of our seeking God's will in a matter. First, we need to commit our ways to Him, or as Proverbs 3:6 says, "Acknowledge Him in all our ways." This is a basic positioning of ourselves before God in which we make ourselves available to do His will. This should be a commitment which we verbalize daily in our times with the Father. As we do this, the proverb goes on to say, "He will direct our paths."

But then we must also submit *specific* situations to Him, being as

truthful and direct as we can. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God..." (James 1:5). We should ask the Lord to help us properly frame the question or problem, so that we don't ask amiss. By being specific in our requests, we can look for specific direction on the issue, all the while recognizing God's sovereign prerogative to act *how* He will and *when* He will. Often, God gives such direction through His written Word, which requires that we spend time studying His Word.

We must be constantly vigilant to seek God at the outset, not as a last resort. Our carnal nature resists this, but diligence in this priority will produce an increasingly close walk with Him, and the ability to discern His direction.

Once we have committed ourselves and the problem to the Lord, it is important that we take the next step, which is to apply our God-given ability of reasoning and analusis to the situation. It is useful



to consider our overall goals, and then test alternative solutions against these goals. For example, if one of our goals is to clear ourselves of personal debt, we don't need divine revelation to know we should postpone buying the stereo that we mentioned earlier if the purchase will add to our debt. Another helpful tool of analysis is to simply list the pros and cons of a possible course of action. Often the weight of logic will be quite clear once we have done this. And then, we can apply that precious commodity called "common sense." A good way is by asking some common sense questions, and answering them honestly. "Is it prudent?" "Can I afford it?" "Will the Lord bless it?"

Another helpful reminder is that major problems can generally be broken down into a series of smaller problems. Consider: How does one eat an elephant? Answer: One bite at a time! Big problems can often be resolved when they are broken down into more "digestible" small problems. Examining our goals, listing the pros and cons, and applying common sense will help make problems and decisions more manageable. While using our powers of logic and common sense may not seem terribly spiritual, this is a valid step in making decisions, and one that God can greatly anoint.

Having sought God and submitted the problem (or decision) for analysis, it is valuable next to seek the counsel of others-not just anybody, but those whom we know are genuinely committed to our welfare. A pastor who is truly functioning in his pastoral calling can often have unique God-given wisdom and insight into our situation. Our husbands and wives also are "help-meets" in finding God's will: we often find our mates have strengths where we are weak, and have clear vision where we have blind spots. Even discussing a matter with our children can be valuable, if for no other reason

erred. The Holy Spirit, in contrast to Satan's assault on our mind, will gently convict our spirit, or bring a word of correction through the Word or through a brother or sister who is committed to our wellbeing. When we see that we have

When a course has been set, we need to follow it through with determination.

In seeking counsel, it is vitally important that we be open to adjustment, and not be locked into a preconceived position. The Holy Spirit is gentle in His direction. We must listen carefully and not expect Him to overpower us.

The final step in decisionmaking is to actually make the decision. We have inquired of God. We have applied wisdom. We have sought godly counsel. Now, decide. At this point, there are usually three options available: ves, no or wait. The first two are obvious, and usually we should attempt to make a definite "yes" or "no" decision. When the time comes for it, however, the third choice, "wait," is legitimate if we are making a conscious decision to wait for some good reason, and are not just avoiding a final decision. Sometimes it may be premature to make a "yes" or "no" decision at this point, for God may not have given clear direction.

Once a decision has been made, it is important not to look back. Satan will often test a decision, and if we heed the doubts, fear and guilt he sows, double-mindedness can result. When a course has been set, we need to follow it through with determination. "Nevertheless, David captured the stronghold."

It is possible, of course, that we have made an incorrect decision. We can expect mistakes because we are not perfect. But we can trust God to show us if we have taken a wrong course, our direction is clear: confess our fault, correct the situation, and go on. God is well able to redeem that which we have truly committed to Him.

In summary, we function in a society which is experiencing the paralysis and degeneration that results from indecision. Our national resolve is dependent on our individual resolve. We must improve our decision-making capabilities if we are going to be built up in Christ and see the strengthening in our national character that we all desire.

As Christians, we have a special obligation to be good decisionmakers. Our mission in life is to both *know* and *do* the will of God. *Doing* requires that we face problems squarely, seek godly wisdom and counsel, and then move ahead boldly, trusting God to adjust us if we have not interpreted His will properly. The ultimate benefit is to ourselves, as the vitality and joy of making good decisions becomes an integral part of our daily adventure in walking with God. Ψ

Notes

- U.S. News and World Report, November 3, 1980, p. 25.
- Chief Executive Magazine, Autumn 1980, Number 13, p. 35.
- 3. Ibid. p. 35.
- 4. 2 Samuel 5:6-8.
- 5. Esther 4:14-16.
- 6. Isaiah 7:14.
- 7. Isaiah 50:7.

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Having Firm Root in Ourselves

by Robert Grant

ONE PARTICULARLY encouraging aspect of the Christian life is the discovery that even people in the Bible whom we tend to elevate to the level of perfection had occasions when their mistakes and limitations became evident. Such times let us know we're not the only ones who occasionally have difficulty understanding all that God is doing or saying in our lives. The following parable of the sower from Mark chapter 4, which is the focal point of our topic in this article, is one such encouraging example of the disciples of Jesus not understanding exactly what He was saving.

"Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times."

Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

When he was alone, the Twelve

and the others around him asked him about the parables (Mark 4:3-10 NIV).

It is comforting to discover that this "elite" group of men who surrounded Jesus, who were closer to Him and shared more of His life than anyone else, had to ask Jesus what this parable meant. It is a relief to know that even the disciples, whom we tend to make super-saints, had need of further clarification of what God was saying. So Jesus went on to give them the explanation of the parable:

The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. *But since they have no root*, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away (vss. 14-17).

The verse central to the theme of this article is verse 17: "But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away." This verse tells us that having a strong, personal "root system" at the foundation of our Christian lives will sustain us and give us permanence and stability in the faith.

The root system of a tree is that part which goes down into the ground and draws the nourishment from the soil. It is the stabilizing and supportive element of a tree, the anchoring point which provides the very life of the tree.

Nature just recently provided me with a vivid example of the necessity of a strong root system. There were two seemingly identical trees in my backvard which were subjected to a severe windstorm which blew against them. When the winds dissipated, only one of those trees had been able to withstand the storm; the other had quickly toppled and was lying on top of the ground. The difference between those two trees was that one of them had a root system strong enough to sustain it when the affliction of the wind hit it. The other didn't. One tree sur-



vived; the other didn't. Although the surviving tree went through a period of losing its leaves, it still stood firm because it had a strong root system.

Verse 17 of the parable tells us that those who do not have firm root in themselves are only temporary. When the winds of affliction or persecution arise, they fall away. Therefore roots are not only for nourishment and strength, but they are also there to sustain us through the days of trouble. A strong root system is the means by which we can survive the day of affliction and persecution.

The Day of Testing

A similar scriptural verification of the importance of strength and with a great crash (Matt. 7:24-27 NIV).

The foundation of a house, like a root system, has to be strong and secure enough to stand against the day of testing and affliction.

One characteristic of the housing industry in Southern California is that the houses are particularly built to stand against the day of the "8.5 on the Richter scale"—the day of the severest earthquake. In that respect, the architectural design of houses in Southern California is different from houses in other parts of the country. They must specifically be able to stand against the day of testing. If a house in San Francisco were built like a house in Atlanta.

A strong root system is the means by which we can survive the day of affliction and persecution.

stability in our root system, the very base of our lives, is Jesus' declaration in Matthew 7:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell when an earthquake hit, the walls would split, the bricks would come apart and the house would be demolished because it hadn't been designed or constructed to withstand the shock of an earthquake.

I believe God is saving that we must build our spiritual houses and establish our personal root systems in such a way that when the day of testing and affliction comes, we will stand firm. We in the United States are not fully aware of the persecution that many already endure around the world, but we must realize that, as Scripture tells us, a day of affliction and persecution is coming. We may not be anticipating some great collapse, but we need to be prepared for the day of calamity. I do not propose to be a prophet of doom, but I do want to be one who faithfully speaks the injunctions of the Lord Jesus that days of difficulty will inevitably come upon the face of the earth. We need to recognize our responsibility to prepare for that day and

Robert Grant completed undergraduate studies in religion at Southern California College and further graduate studies in New Testament and Church History at George Washington University. In the past twelve years Robert has served as as pastor and teacher to parts of the Body of Christ in the U.S. and Europe. Robert presently resides in Mission Viejo, California with his wife, Sue, and their children. He is the senior pastor of Saddleback Valley Fellowship. to develop our root system so that we can stand firm.

The Mentality of Standing Firm

What does it mean to stand firm? I believe that to stand firm means to be unmovable. I don't think it means to muscle up spiritual energies whereby we prepare for battle. Although there is spiritual warfare that we need to be ready for, sometimes a battle mentality can get us into trouble. Peter's response at the time of Jesus' capture in Gethsemane, when he whipped out his sword and sliced off the ear of the high priest's servant, represents a mentality many men have when they are threatened or put under pressure. That mentality causes them to react in a way which is violent in nature and destructive in impact, and which fails to communicate anything of redemption. That mentality is very different from standing firm.

One characteristic that marks Jesus' life is that He stood firm. Jesus stood firm when He was accused and persecuted, when He was beaten and mocked, when He was challenged by the religious leaders of His time and confronted by the secular authorities. He was unshakable within Himself concerning who He was and what His purpose was. Someone who stands firm under circumstances such as the ones Jesus faced is one who is firmly rooted and grounded. That person is unmovable, as opposed to reacting like a hot-head.

I must confess to being the chief of sinners when it comes to a hotheaded mentality. In recent years, when I have had to arbitrate conflicts among Christians who either disagreed among themselves or with me, I have discovered that not everyone likes me or what I'm doing. I have found myself in situations where I was confronted, accused and condemned. Sometimes the accusations were accurate, but many times they were falsehoods and horrible distortions of the facts. In those situations, I have experienced the desire to climb across the top of the table, even leap across the top of the table, to physically confront my accuser. Like Peter, I have experienced hot-headed violent reactions arising within me which I would try to self-righteously justify as "righteous indignation." But the truth of the matter was that I did not have firm root in myself, and in the face of pressures and persecutions, I was not able to just stand firm.

In contrast, someone who knows who they are will remain unmoved in the face of confrontation. In a touchy situation, no matter what anyone says or does, they will maintain their peace because they have firm root in themselves. They know who they are and they can stand firm. People can rant and rave at them all they want, but they will not be shaken.

Standing firm is not marked by stubbornness nor by violent resistance. It is simply *standing firm* like Jesus did. And the only way you and I can know that quality of strong root system, I would like to offer some guidelines on how you can gain firm root in yourself.

First of all, I believe that having root in yourself is determined by accepting the responsibility for having root in yourself. You and I have to individually stand before God and say, "Lord, regardless of whatever my community may be able to do to support me, regardless of whatever its leadership may be able to do to uphold and strengthen me, regardless of whatever my spouse may be able to do to encourage me, I know, Lord, that I alone stand responsible to You to have firm root in myself." I want to emphasize the fact that no one can do this for you. Another's preaching, teaching, exhortation or pressure will not develop your root system. You must do it.

One reason it is such an individual responsibility is that your root system, like that of any plant, is invisible. The root is the unseen part of the individual. This is what David was referring to when he said in Psalm 51, "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward

Standing firm is not marked by stubbornness nor by violent resistance. It is simply standing firm like Jesus did.

life is to have firm root in ourselves. A person who has root in himself will not fight, nor react, nor be enticed or deterred by appealing flattery: "Brother, God is using you in a most wonderful way," or by the railing accusation, "Brother, you are in deception; you are in heresy!" Nothing will move them because their root system, like that of Jesus, is deep in the knowledge of God and His ways.

Having Firm Roots

Now that we have discussed the natural and spiritual benefits of a

parts...." Each one of us as individuals has an unseen part which stands alone before God. It is not visible to the community nor is it observed by your pastor, nor is it completely evident to your husband or wife. That is why it is up to you to develop it. Your root system is beheld by the eyes of God alone.

So the first step you can take to develop a root system is to say, "Lord, it is *my* responsibility to have firm root in myself and I accept that responsibility."

Secondly, I believe that establishing a firm root in yourself re-

quires developing a personal theology, and I purposely emphasize a personal theology in contrast to the theology or doctrines of the group of people to whom you are joined. A body of believers can and should adopt a common statement of faith so that everyone in the group can say, "These are the doctrines that we believe, that we confess, and that we build our lives around." However, something deeper must transpire. Whatever group theology there may be must be personalized and individualized to the point where a person says, "I believe. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. I believe that God the Father raised Him from the dead" You must develop a personal theology so that personally and individually, with your own mouth, you are able to confess what you believe and the convictions you hold to be true.

One of the subtle dangers of an emphasis on community life is that an individual can adopt community standards and convictions and rely upon them to such an extreme that he neglects his own personal theology. And if we neglect or ignore our personal theology, our own root system will not be able to develop.

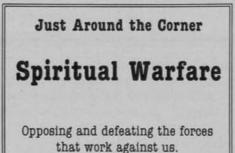
If we were to study the periods of church history when creeds were written, we would see that creeds were often born out of conflict in which persecution and attacks on sound doctrine forced men to come to grips with what they really believed to be true. This is what we need to do, for when we apprehend our own theology individually within our own hearts, and are able to confess it individually with our own mouths, then our root system can deepen to such an extent that in the face of controversy or persecution, no matter how devastating, our root system holds.

If all we have is a group theology or group root system, what happens if the group gets rattled? Many times when a fellowship has gone through a time of shaking, some people in the group have become so personally disillusioned that they spend years away from God simply because they had no personal convictions to act as their own stabilizing root system. you begin to develop a personal theology, something occurs that commits you and obligates you to stand alone before God and to be secure in your uniqueness and satisfied by your individual relationship with Him.

You must develop a personal theology so...you are able to confess what you believe and the convictions you hold to be true.

Wives, it is not sufficient for you to rely solely upon your husband's convictions and faith. You must have your own. What about the situation when he is not there beside you and your own root system has to hold? Men, what about the situations you must face without any brothers to uphold you or exhort you? What about the business deals or other circumstances you find yourself in where nobody is there to observe you except God's holy eyes? What is going to hold you then-a group theology and a group statement of faith? No, it must be what you personally have embraced, your personal theology that you have established in the integrity of your own root system. We must develop a personal theology, for without it we cannot develop a firm root system.

The third factor, which is very closely related to the second, is that you must *be willing to stand alone before God*. Once you accept the responsibility for establishing your root system, and once



Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book Life Together expresses this point so succinctly that I want to simply quote directly from the beginning of that book's third chapter entitled, "The Day Alone."

Many people seek fellowship because they are afraid to be alone. Because they cannot stand loneliness, they are driven to seek the company of other people. There are Christians, too, who cannot endure being alone, who have had some bad experiences with themselves, who hope they will gain some help in association with others. They are generally disappointed. Then they blame the fellowship for what is really their own fault. The Christian community is not a spiritual sanatorium. The person who comes into a fellowship because he is running away from himself is misusing it for the sake of diversion, no matter how spiritual this diversion may appear. He is really not seeking community at all, but only distraction which will allow him to forget his loneliness for a brief time, the very alienation that creates the deadly isolation of man. The disintegration of communication and all genuine experience, and finally resignation and spiritual death, are the result of such attempts to find a cure.

What Bonhoeffer is saying is that a wrongly motivated desire to be involved in community will end in disintegration of communication, diminishing of genuine experience, resignation and finally spiritual death. That is quite a warning, isn't it?

The author begins the next paragraph by stating, "Let him who cannot be alone beware of community." Let him who cannot stand alone before God, who will not be responsible for his own root system, beware of community. To seek fellowship with others simply to avoid loneliness can quickly lead to deception. The third step, then, in gaining firm root in yourself is be willing and able to stand alone before God.

The fourth step is *be willing to suffer*. We tend to view suffering as something that needs to be reaching the deeper, richer soil containing unique minerals and nutrients which produce a finer fruit, as well as providing even greater strength and stability for the day of testing.

The ministry of John the Baptist is an example of one way God can use to bring pruning. When John the Baptist prophesied to his generation, he said things like, "You generation of vipers!" He delivered some very hard words under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. There were those who resisted those pruning words and bucked up against the strong prophetic edge of John the Baptist.

...we need to train ourselves...how to hear and obey the personal, current word that God is speaking to us...

avoided, circumvented or only briefly experienced. But what about the fiery trial, the testing that the Lord sends to prove us? Will we be willing to embrace it and be proven in our endurance? Will we be able to face times of suffering and persecution, times of abuse and misuse by other people? Will we be able to endure all that and still stand firm and embrace what God has in it? Or in that day will our behavior be marked by fretting, disgruntledness and complaint? If we are to develop a firm root system, we must be willing to suffer if need be.

One final step in gaining a firm root in yourself is to *learn to appreciate the privilege of being pruned*. Pruning, or cutting away that which hinders growth, is something that God has ordained to strengthen and deepen our root system. Much of what we go through in terms of testing is just part of God's pruning process.

Why does God prune us? Because one of the benefits of pruning is that it drives the root system even further into the ground, They hardened themselves against the *messenger* and the *message* of the Lord, and thus hardened themselves against the coming of the Kingdom. But there were also those who had ears to hear that prophetic cutting edge. They were able to hear John's difficult words and say, "Yes, that's true." They recognized his correction as the pruning hook of the Lord, and because they embraced that pruning, the way was made straight for them to enter the Kingdom.

If we can hear the hard words of correction, if we can embrace the pruning process of God, our root system will be driven down, giving us the increased ability to stand strong because we have firm root in ourselves.

Obedience, the Key to Standing Firm

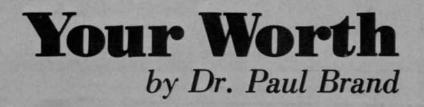
In conclusion, I would like to look once again at Matthew 7:24:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and *puts them into practice* is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

What was the key to that house standing firm? "Everyone who hears these words of mine *and puts them into practice.*" In other words, *obedience*.

I believe that in the days to come we sincerely need a renewed point of view towards obedience. I'm not referring to obedience in the sense of obeying your leader. I'm talking about obeying God's specific word to you. I believe we are coming into a time where our personal obedience to the speaking of God's Spirit within us is preparation for days when obedience will not simply be a religious exercise, but rather an essential requirement for productivity, for the fulfillment of God's purposes, and for life itself.

I doubt that any of us ever reach a level of Christian maturity where suddenly we know perfectly how to be led by the Spirit of God. For that reason, we need to train ourselves, our wives and our children how to hear and obey the personal, current word that God is speaking to us, for that will cause our individual root systems to be deepened and strengthened. If you find yourself in a situation where you feel the Lord prompting you to talk with someone about Him. learn to be sensitive and obedient to that prompting. Exercise that kind of personal, practical obedience, because as the Lord says, ... everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; vet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock." May all of us be found unshakable and obedient in the day of adversity, because at our very foundation we have firm root in ourselves. Y



This article is a reprint from the book Fearfully and Wonderfully Made, which is a fascinating comparison of the various functions of the physical body from a medical viewpoint to the way the individual parts of the Body of Christ function.

AS A BOY growing up in India, I idolized my missionary father who responded to every human need he encountered. Only once did I see him hesitate to help—when I was seven, and three strange men trudged up the dirt path to our mountain home.

At first glance these three seemed like hundreds of other strangers who streamed to our home for medical treatment. Each was dressed in a breechcloth and turban, with a blanket draped over one shoulder. But as they approached, I noticed differences: a mottled quality to their skin, thick, swollen foreheads and ears, and strips of blood-stained cloth bandaging their feet. As they came closer, I noticed they also lacked fingers and one had no toes—his limbs ended in rounded stumps.

My mother's reaction differed from her normal gracious hospitality. Her face took on a pale, tense appearance. "Run and get papa," she whispered to me. "Take your sister, and both of you stay in the house!"

My sister obeyed perfectly, but after calling my father I scrambled on hands and knees to a nearby vantage point. Something sinister was happening, and I didn't want to miss it. My heart pounded violently as I saw the same look of uncertainty, almost fear, pass across my father's face. He stood by the three nervously, awkardly, as if he didn't know what to do. I had never seen my father like that.

The three men prostrated themselves on the ground, a common Indian action that my father disliked. "I am not God—He is the One you should worship," he would usually say, and lift the Indians to their feet. But not this time. He stood still. Finally, in a weak voice he said, "There's not

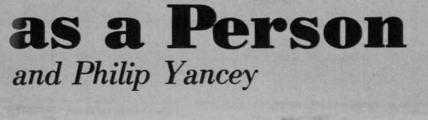




Photo courtesy of Camerique Photography, Blue Bell, PA.

I'll do what I can."

much we can do. I'm sorry. But wait where you are; don't move.

Dr. Paul Brand is Chief of Rehabilitation Branch of U.S. Public Health Service Hospital, Carville, Louisiana, as well as Clinical Professor of Surgery at Louisiana State University Medical School. Besides eighteen years of brilliant pioneering research on the disease of leprosy in India, Dr. Brand has attained world stature as a hand surgeon. Among his long list of honors and distinctions is the prestigious Albert Lasker Award and the appointment as Commander of the Order of the British Empire.

He ran to the dispensary while

Philip Yancey serves as Executive Editor of Campus Life Magazine and Editor of Campus Life Books. He is a free lance writer and is author of After the Wedding, Growing Places, and the bestselling Where is God When It Hurts. the men squatted on the ground. Soon he returned with a roll of bandages, a can of salve, and a pair of surgical gloves he was struggling to put on. This was most unusual—how could he treat them wearing gloves?

Father washed the strangers' feet, applied ointment to their sores, and bandaged them. Strangely, they did not wince or cry out as he touched their sores.

While father bandaged the men, mother had been arranging a selection of fruit in a wicker basket. She set it on the ground beside them, suggesting they take the basket. They took the fruit but left the basket, and as they disappeared over the ridge I went to pick it up.

"No!" mother insisted. "Don't touch it! And don't go near that place where they sat." Silently I watched father take the basket and burn it, then scrub his hands with hot water and soap. Then mother bathed my sister and me, though we had had no direct contact with the visitors.

That incident was my first exposure to leprosy, the oldest recorded disease and probably the most dreaded disease throughout history. Although I might have recoiled from the suggestion as a boy of seven, I eventually felt called to spend my life working among leprosy patients. For the past thirty years I have been with them almost daily, forming many intimate and lasting friendships among these courageous people. During that time, many exaggerated fears and prejudices about leprosy have crumbled, at least in the medical profession. Partly because of effective drugs, leprosy is now viewed as a controllable. barely contagious disease.

However, in most parts of the world less than a quarter of leprosy patients are actually under any form of treatment. Thus, to many it is still a disease that can cause severe lesions, blindness, and loss of hands and feet. How does leprosy produce such terrible effects?

As I studied leprosy patients in India, several findings pushed me toward a rather simple theory: could it be that the horrible results of the disease came about because leprosy patients had lost the sense of pain? The disease was not at all like a flesh-devouring fungus; rather, it attacked mainly a single type of cell, the nerve cell. After years of testing and observation, I felt sure that the theory was sound.

The gradual loss of the sense of pain leads to misuse of those body parts most dependent on pain's A similar pattern can be found in other diseases. In sickle cell anemia or leukemia the malfunction of a single type of cell can quickly destroy a person. Or, if the cells that keep kidney filters in repair fail, a person may soon die of toxic poisoning.

This fact of the body—the worth of each of its parts—is graphically revealed by a disease such as leprosy. The failure of one type of cell can bring on tragic consequences. One who studies the vast quantity of cells and their startling diversity can come away

... Christ chose each member to make a unique contribution to His Body. Without that contribution, the Body could malfunction severely.

protection. A person uses a hammer with a splintery handle, does not feel the pain, and an infection flares up. Another steps off a curb, spraining an ankle, and, oblivious, keeps walking. Another loses use of the nerve that triggers the eyelid to blink every few seconds for lubricating moisture; the eye dries out, and the person becomes blind.

The millions of cells in a hand or foot, or the living and alert rod and cone cells in the eye, can be rendered useless because of the breakdown of just a few nerve cells. Such is the tragedy of leprosy. with the sense that each cell is easily expendable and of little consequence. But the same body that impresses us with specialization and diversity also affirms that *each* of its many members is valuable and often essential for survival.

Interestingly, the worth of each member is also the aspect most often stressed in biblical imagery of the Body of Christ (see Rom. 12:5, 1 Cor. 12, and Eph. 4:16). Listen to the mischievous way in which Paul expresses himself in 1 Corinthians: "Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are

From Fearfully and Wonderfully Made by Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey. Copyright 1980 by Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey. Used by permission from Zondervan Publishing.

We highly recommend this book as interesting and informative supplemental reading for anyone desiring to know his individual importance to the Body of Christ. It is available at most Christian bookstores. indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (vv. 22-26).

Paul's point is clear: Christ chose each member to make a unique contribution to His Body. Without that contribution, the Body could malfunction severely. Paul underscores that the less visible members (I think of organs like the pancreas, kidney, liver, and spleen) are perhaps the most valuable of all. Although I seldom feel consciously grateful for them, they perform daily functions that keep me alive.

I must keep coming back to the image of the body, because in our Western societies the worth of persons is determined by how much society is willing to pay for their services. Airplane pilots, for example, must endure rigorous education and testing procedures before they can fly for commercial airlines. They are then rewarded with luxurious lifestyles and societal respect. Within the corporate world, visible symbols such as office furnishings, bonuses, and salaries announce the worth of any given employee. As a person climbs, he or she will collect a sequence of important-sounding titles (the U.S. government issues a book cataloging ten thousand of them).

In the military, the chain of command defines a person's worth. One salutes superior officers, gives orders to those of lower rank, and one's uniform and stripes alert everyone to his or her relative status. In civil service status is reflected in a individual's "GS grade," a numerical label.

Our culture is shot through with rating systems, beginning from the first grades of school when children receive marks defining relative performance. That, combined with factors such as physical appearance, popularity, and athletic prowess, may well determine how valuable people perceive themselves to be.

Living in such a society, my vision gets clouded. I begin viewing janitors as having less human worth than jet pilots. When that happens, I must turn back to the lesson from the body, which Paul draws against just such a background of incurable competition and value ranking. In human society, a janitor has little status because he is so replaceable. Thus, we pay the janitor less and tend to look down on him. But the body's division of labor is not based on status; status is, in fact, immaterial to the task being performed. The

you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it"(James 2:2-4, 9-10).

Paul states the same truth positively, "Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all" (Col. 3:11).

In our rating-conscious society that ranks everything from baseball teams to "the best chili in New York," an attitude of relative worth can easily seep into the church of Christ. But the design of the group of people who follow Jesus should not resemble a military machine or a corporate structure. The church Jesus founded is more like a family in which the son retarded from birth has as much worth as his brother the Rhodes scholar. It is like the body, composed of cells most striking in their diversity but most effective in their mutuality.

If each cell accepts the needs of the whole Body as the purpose of its life, then the Body will live in health.

body's janitors are indispensable. If you doubt that, talk with someone who must go in for kidney dialysis twice a week.

The Bible directs harsh words to those who show favoritism. James spelled out a situation we can all identify with: "Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, 'Here's a good seat for you,' but you say to the poor man, 'You stand there,' or, 'Sit on the floor by my feet,' have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" He concludes, "If

God requires only one thing of His "cells": that each person be loyal to the Head. If each cell accepts the needs of the whole Body as the purpose of its life, then the Body will live in health. It is a brilliant stroke, the only pure egalitarianism I observe in all of society. He has endowed every person in the Body with the same capacity to respond to Him. In Christ's Body a teacher of threeyear-olds has the same value as a bishop, and that teacher's work may be just as significant. A widow's dollar can equal a millionaire's annuity. Shyness, beauty, eloquence, race, sophistication-none of these matter, only loyalty to the Head, and through

the Head to each other.

Our little church at Carville includes one devout Christian named Lou, a Hawaiian by birth, who is marked with visible deformities caused by leprosy. With eyebrows and eyelashes missing, his face has a naked, unbalanced appearance, and paralyzed eyelids cause tears to overflow as if he is crying. He has become almost totally blind because of the failure of a few nerve cells on the surface of his eyes.

Lou struggles constantly with his growing sense of isolation from the world. His sense of touch has faded now, and that, combined with his near-blindness, makes him afraid and withdrawn. He most fears that his sense of hearing may also leave him, for Lou's main love in life is music. He can contribute only one "gift" to our church, other than his physical presence: singing hymns to God while he accompanies himself on an autoharp. Our therapists designed a glove that permits Lou to continue playing his autoharp without damaging his insensitive hand.

But here is the truth about the Body of Christ: not one person in Carville contributes more to the spiritual life of our church than Lou playing his autoharp. He has as much impact on us as does any member there by offering as praise to God the limited, frail tribute of his music. When Lou leaves, he will create a void in our church that no one else can fill-not even a professional harpist with nimble fingers and a degree from Julliard School of Music. Everyone in the church knows that Lou is a vital, contributing member, as important as any other member-and that is the secret of Christ's Body. If each of us can learn to glory in the fact that we matter little except in relation to the Body, and if each will acknowledge the worth in every other member, then perhaps the cells of Christ's Body will begin acting as He intended. **T**

The Uniqueness of the Individual by Paul Petric

IN RECENT YEARS, God has been stressing the need for unity in the Body of Christ, with major emphasis on laying down our independence and learning interdependence—how to depend on one another and function together. This emphasis on unity has been healthy, even essential, and it will continue to be an ongoing part of God's plan.

However, the principle of unity is not an end in itself. It is rather a preparatory word, a foundation for diversity. Out of unity will spring new *expressions of diversity*. It is essential that unity come first, though, because if we start with diversity, we will never achieve unity. Diversity must come out of unity, out of a singularity of pur-



on, which He has emphasized in recent years—character development. God has been maturing our

A look at the boundless diversity God has created within the Body.

pose and goal and will. Otherwise, diversity will breed division.

There is another emerging aspect of truth that God is building characters, stressing such fundamental principles as husbands loving their wives, wives being supportive of their husbands, parents raising their children correctly and Christian employees doing their jobs with diligence. There has been such emphasis on character lessons that often we have wished we could get on to something else.

In fact, character development is intended to lead to something else; that something else is our *calling* in God, which, basically defined, is *any* vocation, spiritual or secular, through which a person extends the Lord's influence in the earth. Although character development, like unity, is a neverending process, it is not the end. It is a preparation for us to learn how to function in our calling. We must have a foundation of basic, godly character to be able to properly function in the call God has given us.

So we can see that out of the unity that has been developing among Christians, God intends to reveal diversity; and out of the ongoing character development that He has so painstakenly emphasized in our lives, God intends to give expression to our calling. There are three areas I want to discuss which will give us an idea of the diversity and uniqueness that is possible in terms of the functions and callings.

Diversity in Gifts

One area where we see evidence of diversity in the Body is in the various gifts of the Spirit. God's intention in giving gifts to men and women of His covenant community is that the individual who receives a gift be a faithful steward of it and a channel or instrument through which that gift can flow to build up others in the Body of Christ.

It is very clear in Scripture that receiving a gift or gifts of the Spirit is not limited to one or two individuals. It is something that every member of the Body of Christ can and should function in. The Holy Spirit has given to every man a gift, and that gives us an indication of the incredible variety that is possible in the gifts and ways of administering those gifts.

Each of us will uniquely ad-

minister the gift God has given us, and this variety is a thrilling part of the diversity God intends. In the same way that all of us differ in the way we entertain guests, with His wisdom and His gifts are like a diamond with a thousand different facets, all individually different, yet together revealing the full glory and beauty of that gem.

The more diversity we find ourselves functioning in, the greater expression we will see of the incredible diversity of God.

some of us presenting the meal formally, serving from the left and clearing from the right, and others serving in a casual, family style, putting all the food out on the table at once and just digging in, we will differ in the ways we administrate God's gifts.

We should be relieved to realize that we don't have to be like everybody else. My own unique way of sharing my God-given gift will be a blessing to the Body because it is birthed out of God's own unique impartation to me. A good example of this is a man I know who prophesies like this: "Well, the Lord wants to tell y'all that it's time for you to get moving and go out and do what He says...." His way of administering the gift of prophesy is in his own down-home, country style and that is what makes his gift unique.

Breaking free from a limited, myopic concept of how the gifts should function in us releases us to diversity. The more diversity we find ourselves functioning in, the greater expression we will see of the incredible diversity of God. He is a many-faceted God. His grace,

S.

Paul Petrie majored in psychology at Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky and studied theology at Asbury Seminary. Paul is now the senior pastor of Covenant Church in Lexington, Kentucky, where he and his wife, Becky, reside. They have two children. God is calling us to devote ourselves to seeking the gifts so that He may then free us to administrate those gifts in our own unique way. But what is our attitude to be for doing so? In 1 Corinthians 12:31 we read:

But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way [to adminster those gifts].

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing (1 Cor. 12:31, 13:1-2).

Paul, in these verses, is emphasizing the individual's attitude, both for seeking the gifts and for administrating them. When Paul refers to noisy gongs or cymbals, he isn't stressing the unpleasant sound they produce, but rather that gongs and cymbals are *inanimate objects*—instrumentalities that have no personhood. He is saying that in the administration of the gift, God intends for the person to involve himself and do so in love. Our humanity is to be involved in the process.

What Paul is saying is if we utilize the gifts, but are not motivated by love, then we become depersonalized. "If I have the gift of prophecy and knowledge and faith but I don't have love, I am nothing." What makes you an important part in the Body is not your gift, as beneficial as that is, but your love. Love is what "puts you on the map" in terms of being an important individual in the community.

God is building a Body, and if you are to be a significant part of that Body, your sharing of your gift must be motivated by the right attitude. If the motivation behind the gifts is competition or striving to be super-spiritual, Paul says that no one will profit (1 Cor. 13:3), least of all the one exercising the gift.

So we find ourselves with an entirely new motivation for seeking our unique positions in the Body and our own unique gifts-love. Nothing will motivate more than love. When there is true covenant love for the assembly of people to whom you are joined, you will be motivated to seek God diligently for your gift, not because you wish importance or super-spirituality, but because you genuinely want to share God's gifts with the people you love. That same love will make us faithful administrators of the gift the Father has placed in our stewardship.

The first area, then, in which God wants us to move into new dimensions of diversity is that of our gift—to seek our own unique gift, to function in that gift in our own unique way, and to be sure our motive for sharing that gift is love.

Diversity in Temperaments

Another area in which we are to find our uniqueness is in our basic approach or orientation to life. In Romans 12:6-8 we read:

And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

I would tend to substitute the "temperaments" for the word "gifts" in that passage. word Temperament, which is a person's basic approach to life, is so affected by his gift that the two cannot be truly separated. Our individual gifts determine, or at least greatly affect, our responses in situations, our evaluation of situations and our evaluation of individuals. (Bill Gothard's teachings on this topic have been extremely helpful.)

I want to briefly list some examples of various gifts or approaches to life which a person may have, with a very short description of the basic life orientation of those who may have these gifts. Although this list is far from using his personal assets and that which is his, not just to bless others, but to meet their needs.

The *mercy-extender* is one whose basic life orientation is to identify with and comfort those who are in distress.

The *leader* is one who coordinates the activity of the others for the purpose of achieving common goals, orchestrating the gifts of others to achieve the best result.

The following is a hypothetical situation illustrating how these people, with their different gifts and orientations, might respond to the same situation.

A little boy enters a room carrying a glass of water. The glass slips out of the boy's hand, falls to the floor and shatters. The prophet's response to the accident is, "That's what happens when you are not

What makes you an important part in the Body is not your gift, as beneficial as that is, but your love.

comprehensive, you may recognize traits similar to your own in the ones we list.

The *prophet's* orientation is to correct life and expose unrighteousness. When he looks into a situation he will primarily look into it correctively, observing the things that need to be changed.

The *servant's* orientation and basic approach to life is to help meet various practical needs in the local body.

The *teacher's* goal is to clarify truth, to search for facts and to provide them to the community.

The *exhorter* is generally one whose orientation is to stimulate faith and to encourage people to something higher. His response in a situation is to call a person to higher achievement, to exhort them to do better. He is a cheerleader in a very positive sense.

The giver, obviously, is one who gives. He thinks in terms of

careful." The servant's response is, "Let me help you clean it up." The teacher's response is, "Son, the reason you dropped the glass was because you were only holding it with one hand, and the outside of the glass was wet and slippery." The exhorter says, "Next time be just a little more careful. Carry it a little more cautiously, remembering what just happened so that it does not happen again." The giftgiver says, "You know, I was downtown yesterday and bought glasses just like that. Let me replace the one you broke." The mercy-extender responds, "Don't feel too badly. It could happen to anyone. It's all right."

Now the leader knows who is the giver and who is the server and so forth, and depending upon the child's response, he will call in the one with the appropriate gift. If the child is crying, he calls in the mercy-extender and holds the prophet off. But if the child is not adequately repentant for the situation, he brings in the prophet and sends the mercy-extender into the other room, so he won't get angry with the prophet.

Of course, we want to avoid interpreting and applying the truth of these various approaches too dogmatically, because all of us are expected to function to some degree in exhortation, service, giving, extending mercy and the other activities we listed. We have all been commanded by Scripture to do all of those things. But the truth that we see is a person's tendency to function predominately in one of those gifts more than the others, reflecting their primary temperament or orientation to life situations.

As we discover and learn how to be responsible over our unique gifts and temperament, we find it necessary to properly relate to other people who have different gifts and temperaments, learning how to distinguish without criticism. If we can interpret a man's unique motivational approach as a gift from God, it helps us to be more open and less critical when that temperament is different than ours. Basically then, a person's motivational gift or temperament will tend to govern his basic response to a situation.

That motivational gift will also be a basis for one's evaluation of another person. Each gift has its own unique standard of evaluation. Obviously, there are built-in conflicts when people evaluate situations or one another differently. They will miss one another's point of view because their priorities and standards for evaluation are different. Therefore, it is important that we learn to receive not just the person, but his gifts as well. Often, because one's gifts or temperaments are different and don't fit into our criterion of what is "spiritual," we reject his gift and miss out on the benefit of the diversity he brings to the Body of Christ. We miss out on what that person can add to our lives and the lives of others.

We need to recognize that balance is only found in the Body of Christ as a *whole*, when everyone's ministries and gifts balance one another. God wants to give us an appreciation for our own gift and its place, but He also wants us to appreciate other people's gifts and their place in the Body of son's character is a gift to us and the rest of the Body of Christ which we should recognize and appreciate.

Diversity in Our Callings

The third aspect of diversity we want to examine is diversity in our callings. As we stated earlier, God is stressing the foundational principle of unity with other Christians, and also the foundational principle

Our destiny is to shine brighter and brighter in the midst of a darkening, depressing world situation.

Christ, because we need each other for balance. In Romans 12:16 Paul says, "Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought." In other words, we need to be aware of and grateful for our gift, but not fall into the trap of thinking that our gift is the best or most spiritual or the ultimate in responding properly to situations, or that in order for anyone else to really "have it together" they have to be like us.

If I could impart one thing to all Christians it would be the necessity of having a deep respect for every other man and woman in the Body of Christ, based on the realization that God is at work in their lives and they have something important to contribute to us and to the Body. In a community of people who are functioning in their own unique motivational gifts, the gifts others have balance and complement mine, bringing us together to a new place in God.

We need to delight in the differences and learn to embrace the uniqueness with joy. Differing perspectives help all of us together to see what God is doing in the situation. When someone in the Body has a different perspective or a different gift than we do, we need to realize that God has brought that diversity for a specific purpose. That uniqueness in a perof healthy character development in our lives, and the need for proper attitude and motivation. God's intention is to use both of these foundations to bring us to new places of diversity and diligence in apprehending the *calling* for which God has apprehended us.

A concise definition of calling would be the vocation or realm in which a man functions to bring that which is in his sphere under the rule of Jesus Christ, the King. We need to understand calling in the context of rulership, because ultimately our calling is the means by which we extend the government of God, subduing the earth and bringing it under the rule of Jesus Christ. Our calling is for the purpose of extending the reign of the Lord.

In many ways, our calling is synonymous with the will of God for our lives. If we want God's will for our lives, we need to diligently seek the calling God has for our lives. A man understands his purpose in life in terms of his calling, and ultimately his satisfaction comes in fulfilling his call. If a man does not find his call, he will be frustrated about his life, regardless of the degree of spiritual maturity, family bliss or financial success he attains. There will always be a measure of frustration in a man's life until he finds and

gives himself to fulfilling his calling in life.

God provides different abilities to allow people to have different kinds of callings, and He also provides the energy a person needs to accomplish that task. I believe that when a person expends that energy aimlessly, and accomplishes nothing, that loss of human potential is a transgression against the Creator. Many people spend their lives doing nothing except extending themselves into greater selfsatisfaction. That is a transgression against God because those energies and abilities were destined for a particular God-glorifying purpose in God's overall redemptive plan. God wants to focus a person's full attention and energy on that which is his calling, so that he can give

for all of these emanate from the Father's purpose and will, and they are all channels through which men can direct their life's energies to extend the Kingdom of God.

The emphasis we have placed on pastoring, though it is an essential calling, has unfortunately made many people feel that being a pastor is the only worthy calling. Sometimes the attitude has been "I want to be a pastor, so I'll just plod along in my secular job until I am released into full-time ministry." Regrettably, they don't realize that their secular job is their full-time ministry. For some, being a pastor is a high call of God; for others, it is the worst position they could hold, because it is not God's call on their lives.

Our calling is for the purpose of extending the reign of the Lord.

himself to apprehending it with diligence.

There are, I believe, five basic categories in which a man can be called, through which the government of God can be extended throughout the earth. The first category I will mention is the ministry. All callings in God are high callings, but ministry is unique because of its governmental responsibilities for the community of the redeemed. The other four categories would include: laborers (men who function in factories and in custodial situations, etc.); businessmen (those involved in sales, accounting, management, service, etc.); artisans and craftsmen (musicians, artists, and tradesmen such as builders, roofers, carpet layers, carpenters, etc.); and professionals (doctors, dentists, lawyers, teachers, etc.).

Let me stress that all of these are high callings because they are callings in God. There is no such thing as an unimportant calling,

The Purpose of Our Gifts and Callings

How does God intend for us to put His gifts and callings to use? Let me first say that I believe we have a number of years ahead of us in which we will see God's plan for mankind unfold. If there is the possibility that the return of the Lord is not as imminent as we have thought, we need to look ahead toward a future of extending His rulership, when we will find ourselves in significant places of responsibility and influence. We need to be diligent in our calling now, so that in twenty years, all those who have diligently developed their skill and submitted themselves to the tutorship of men who could train them, will have gained years of experience and become recognized as experts in their fields. They will not only be sought after to do the job, but to become advisors to others in their field. Men in the world will come to professionals, artisans, businessmen and laborers in the redeemed community with a sense of respect, because they will know there is something worthy of respect there which is extending godly influence, and the influence they extend will be that of the Kingdom of God.

Let me emphasize here that promotion is not the goal—*rulership* is the goal. Promotion is a means to rulership, but it must come after the essential adjustments have been worked in a man's lifestyle which enable him to represent God accurately and to make godly decisions.

In the midst of a society that is rapidly deteriorating in its values and goals, it is a privilege to apprehend the call of God and so give ourselves to diligence that everything we do reflects the anointing of God and the life of the Holy Spirit. As a community of redeemed people, God intends us to be a light shining forth, so that the world will come to the rising of our brightness. Our destiny is to shine brighter and brighter in the midst of a darkening, deteriorating world situation. Our future is one of influence, one of rulership, one of glorifying God.

Our destiny is rulership. It is a destiny of God mingling His glory and His holiness and His righteousness with the community of His earthen vessels, so that the universe will stand in awe of what He does through them. God has joined Himself to a people with whom He has made covenant, intending for each person to function in his diverse gifts and callings, until a unique expression comes forth that radiates the glory of God which is destined to fill the earth. If we truly become the Body of Christ, we can be none other than rulers because He is the ruler, the governor of the nations, the One whose scepter and throne rules over all. **T**

Remember: Friday, March 6, is a national day of prayer and fasting.

Helpful Books from New Wine



Vintage Years is a collection of some of the most popular and helpful articles
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ONE NIGHT I flipped on the television set and caught newsman David Brinkley interviewing the well-known columnist Ann Landers on the occasion of her 25th anniversary as a columnist. Ann Landers is probably the most widely read woman in the world. Her column, in which she responds to readers' questions with practical advice on a variety of issues, appears in approximately one thousand newspapers. During the interview David Brinkley asked, "What is the most common theme of the letters that come across your desk?" Without a moment's hesitation, Ann Landers replied, "The most common theme expressed by the people who write to me is this: 'What's wrong with me?' "

When a person becomes a Christian, that feeling doesn't automatically pass away. Most of us at one time or another have asked that same poignant question, "What's wrong with me?" The sixteen-year-old girl who never has a date takes those long, soulful looks in the mirror and says, "What's wrong with me?" The businessman who is passed up at promotion time wonders, "What's wrong with me?" The couple whose marriage runs into difficulty while all their friends seem to be getting along well asks, "What's wrong with us?" A friend criticizes you in public; you react in anger, but when you get back to your room, all alone with your thoughts, it comes back to that same introspective question: "What's wrong with me?"

Introspection isn't necessarily

all bad. It can be healthy for us to examine ourselves and consider areas that need to be corrected. But if that kind of thinking becomes an obsession, then God Himself wants to address that question. If your life has been united with Christ, God's answer to that question is, "There's *nothing* wrong with you. You are united with My Son, and therefore, you are okay." That is the good news, the gospel: In Christ there is nothing wrong with us; we are okay.

As Christians we have to continually exercise faith to lay hold upon the truth that there is nothing wrong with us. The old nature continually slips back through the cracks of our lives and tries to convince us that there is something wrong with us. This is where the biblical word must be applied: "Reckon yourselves dead to sin and alive to God." This is as much a declaration as an exhortation. In Christ we are living in right relationship with God. There is nothing wrong with us.

Paul Anderson, my fellow pastor at Trinity Church in San Pedro, California, recently brought us a powerful teaching that set before us the reality of Christ's life in us: "Certain thoughts may come haunting you, telling you that something is out of whack in your life, or tempting you to cool off in your love and ardor for the Lord. Because you want to be real and not phoney, you may say, 'I just don't *feel* it. I don't want to fake anything....'"

He went on to share with us this



Larry Christenson has served as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in San Pedro, California since 1960. His influence, however, extends far beyond his local pastorate because of his associate ministry as a conference speaker and the many books he has authored including The Christian Family and The Renewed Mind. He and his wife Nordis with their four children live in San Pedro, California. simple and basic truth: The reality of Christ's life in you means that there is a new creature who delights to worship the Lord, who desires above everything to walk in the things of God, in integrity and honesty. The question then is "Do you want to identify with that new creature in Christ, or do you want to identify with the old man?" There is a tug from both sides. You must choose where to place your identity. You can identify with the old self, which will constantly nag you with the thought, "What's wrong with me?" Or you can identify with who you really are in Christ and say, "There's nothing wrong with me. In Christ Jesus, I'm okay." There is nothing phoney about identifying with the new creature in Christ just because the old nature may be nagging at our emotions.

The Practical Outworking

The reality that in Christ we are okay is what lies behind the Apostle Paul's "therefore" in Ephesians 5:1: "Since in Christ God forgave you and made you okay...therefore, be imitators of God...and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us."

From the assurance that we are okay and that there is nothing wrong with us, we move into the outworking of that truth in everyday life: "Therefore, be imitators of God. Therefore, walk in love." That truth must come into practical expression in our lives. because the other side of the Lord telling us "You're O.K. and there's nothing wrong with you" is His desire to say to us: "In you I am well pleased. I, the Lord, am not only rejoicing in the fact that you are a new creature, but I rejoice in what happens in your life as a result of that truth."

This principle proceeds from our understanding of God Himself. Just as we rejoice in who He is, we also rejoice in what He does. We rejoice in God's omnipotence, His omniscience and His eternalness, but we also rejoice in the work of Christ that effected redemption, which is the outworking of God's nature and being. There is a work that proceeds from the being of God. In the same way, there is a work that proceeds from our being in Christ. Our sense of worth is related not only to our standing in Christ, but also to that which proceeds from the reality of being "okay" in Christ. "Worth is related to work. The work does not give us worth, but the work confirms our worth and makes it real," was the succinct way that Paul Anderson put it to our congregation.

In Ephesians 5:10, the Apostle says, "Try to learn what is pleasing to God." Why? Because moving in a dimension of life that pleases God will confirm our sense that there is nothing wrong with us. That is what Jesus did. He sought to please God, even to giving Himself up as a sacrifice; then God took responsibility to see that His life counted for something.

The real heartery behind the question, "What's wrong with me?" that people are asking advisors like Ann Landers is, "Why doesn't my life *count* for something?" To that concern, the Apostle is saying, "If you want your life to count, be an imitator of Jesus. Walk as He walked. Find out what is pleasing to God, and do it, then God will see to it that your life counts for something." God and God vindicated Him in the end. God made Jesus' life count for something and He will make our life count for something if we focus on "What can I do to please God?"

Even at a human level, wouldn't you rather please the person whose opinion really counts? Wouldn't you rather please the coach of your team than the fans in the bleachers?

My father once coached a football team that had a great left halfback, a stellar performer. But after the third game of the season he came to my father and said, "I'm quitting the team."

When my father asked him why he was quitting, the halfback, a cocky fellow, replied, "Because the quarterback ran me only three times in the game on Saturday, and I'm the best halfback in the state!"

My father answered, "Well, the quarterback didn't follow orders."

The halfback took some comfort in the reply, and a smug look began to steal over his face until my father said, "No, as a matter of fact, I told the quarterback not to run you at all."

Astonished, the fellow sputtered, "What?! Why?"

"Tll tell you why," his coach answered him. "The sportswriters say you're the greatest running halfback in the history of the state, but the *worst* blocker. Do you know why you go for long gains? Because over there at right halfback our best blocker is cleaning out for you. But when a play comes the other way, and you have the blocking assignment, you lie down on the job."

To that the halfback replied, "I'll show 'em."

On the first play of the next game, this star halfback ran interference and knocked out two men, allowing the right halfback to run for about 30 yards. The next play was one my father had not designed; the halfbacks switched places and the same play was run to the opposite side with the star halfback blocking once again. This time he opened up a path for his teammate to run the ball all the way down to the two yard line.

If our focus is upon pleasing our Coach...then He will be responsible that our life counts for something.

Pleasing the Coach

When God makes your life count for something, it will not necessarily be according to worldly standards. Not many people thought Jesus' life counted for much when He hung on the cross, but He was doing what pleased When he got up from the block he had thrown, he turned and waved to the bench to let his coach know that he had gotten the message. In pleasing the coach he became a far better football player.

If our focus is upon pleasing our Coach, upon doing what makes Him happy, then He will be responsible that our life counts for something. The person who is always saying, "How can I make something out of my life," has his focus on the wrong object—himself—and that can pull a person into a whirlpool of negative self-analysis. But when a person's focus is on what pleases God, then He will be responsible to make that



T.A. Hegre...defines a life that pleases God as one which has "the sanctity of the relaxed grip.

person's life count for something—not necessarily according to standards that we ourselves or other people might set, but according to His standards and purposes.

A Life That Pleases God

Since the Apostle encourages us to direct our lives to that which pleases the Lord, the question for which we need an answer is: "What *does* please God?" Basically two things, according to the Apostle's teachings. The first is found in Ephesians 5:11, "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness." He cites two particular manifestations of this: *immorality* and *covetousness* (an improper attitude toward material possessions).

A Sunday school teacher once told me about a teenage girl in her class who shared this experience with her. The girl had gotten into a situation with a young man in which she was under tremendous temptation to go beyond the borders of morality. Right in the middle of that tense, difficult situation, the one thought that came to her was, "If I go through with this, it would be a tremendous disappointment to my Sunday school teacher." That thought kept her from succumbing to temptation. At a critical moment God used the influence of that Sunday school teacher to remind her of the kind of life that pleases Him.

The other manifestation of the "unfruitful works of darkness" that the Apostle concentrates on is covetousness. T.A. Hegre of Bethany Fellowship gives us an insight into covetousness when he defines a life that pleases God as one which has "the sanctity of the relaxed grip." In other words, a person takes all that God gives him and holds it openhandedly, telling the Lord, "You can take it or You can leave it in my hand. I can abound, or I can be abased." That is a life that pleases God-a life that rejoices in the material blessings God gives without clenching them too tightly.

The second aspect of a life that pleases God after we have rejected "the unfruitful works of darkness," is to be "...filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Ephesians 5:18-19). The question "What's wrong with me?" grows in a life of isolation—a life turned inward in excessive introspection and self-centeredness. If you belong to a praising fellowship, that wrong focus can be replaced with a focus on God and what pleases Him.

Another integral part of being filled with the Spirit is continual gratitude to God, "Always and in everything giving thanks..." (Ephesians 5:20). Gratitude roots our security in God, so that we're not all uptight about ourselves or preoccupied with the question, "What's wrong with me?" Rather, we are focused on God and the life that His grace makes possible.

There is nothing wrong with us. The Lord has extended the grace to redeem us and give us a new nature so that He can say in all honesty, "You're okay." And He provides the grace that reproduces in us the life of His Son, so that He can say to us, as He did to Him, "With you I am well pleased!"

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1980 Issues with Binder

We have put aside a limited supply of our 1980 issues of New Wine Magazine to be sold as a collection and reference set. If you are new to our family of readers or if you are missing or have damaged past issues, this is your opportunity to obtain the complete year of New Wine. We suggest you order this set as soon as possible as our supply is limited. Cut along this dotted line

A Study Guide A Reference Set An Item for Collection



Good and profitable

Your Intercessors Reports have been a good resource and example of Christian attitude in the political arena. Also, I work in the Medical Support field so Dr. Koop's articles and the abortion booklet were interesting.

It has been good and profitable reading the articles by Mumford, Prince, Simpson, Basham and Baxter. My life is always clarified or changed as God works on me as a result of those men's insights and visions.

Keith Dorset Fairfax, VA

Emphasis reflected

The new cover format on *New Wine* is a step in the right direction in giving the magazine a more professional, polished look. Recent articles on family, government, etc., are very timely, and I think accurately reflect God's present emphasis to us.

> David Kocher Riverside, CA

Pass the word

"Preparing the Next Generation" by John Duke in your January '81 issue was, to put it simply, an extremely well written piece of literature. I am going to let many people I know read this article.

> R. Grochowske W.S., Georgia

Priorities

In your December '80 issue you practically elevate "The Family" to a position of sanctity and worship. Jesus tells us that we *must not* put the family or any member of it before Himself. He comes first and is alone worthy to be honored.

> Mrs. Joan Michel Middletown, NY

Encouraging words

Although I do not share all of your doctrine, you have my deepest respect and admiration for publishing a periodical free of advertising and providing a seminary student with some stimulating and helpful material. Especially appreciated was the article by Don Basham, *Christmas is for Families* [Dec. '80], a timely piece of creative journalism.

> Tim Cole Dallas, TX

Jesus the physician

The article about little Susannah in your December issue was especially meaningful to me. As an intensive care unit nurse (not working now), I could see the medical hopelessness of her case, as my experience has shown me so many in her condition who have not made it.

It is dangerously easy when working in a hospital, especially ICU, to make medicine and doctors lord of one's thinking—to think they in themselves hold the answer—the destiny to the patient's recovery. Thank you for this wonderful article that so beautifully proves that man, medicine, etc., are only vessels to the Great Physician—Jesus our Lord.

> Mrs. Smith Memphis, TN

Spreading the word

I'm introducing *New Wine* to many people who need teachings of solid truth beyond the milkstage Christianity. Keep up the soundness in teaching and sensitivity to the Spirit. The ministry of this magazine is desperately needed by millions.

Darwin DeHaan Jerusalem, Israel

Alvie

P.O. Box Z, Mobile, AL 36616

"Alvie and the Great Event" by Don Basham was truly an inspiration by the Holy Spirit. My husband not only read it to the children, but to the children at church and then we passed it on to some friends of ours to read to their children. It certainly made me feel better about all the small "unimportant" daily chores I must do in caring for my home.

> Mrs. Robert Rowe, Jr. N. Little Rock, AR

The editorial policy and purpose of *New Wine* is: (1) to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom of God to all nations, (2) to work with all Christian ministries for the maturity and unity of His Church, (3) thus making ready a people prepared for the coming of the Lord. We recognize that, according to the Scriptures, God uses men given as ministries to build His Church in the earth. However, the basis of our relationship is not primarily commitment to human personalities, but to Jesus Christ as Head, to the Holy Scriptures as the ultimate standard by which all revelation and practice is to be judged and to God's purpose for His people in the earth at this time, as interpreted by the Holy Spirit. *New Wine* is a non-subscription magazine supported by the voluntary contributions of those who believe in its mission. All

gifts are tax deductible. A tax-deductible receipt for contributions is available at year-end upon request. *New Wine* Magazine is under the supervision of an editorial board which meets several times each year to provide direction and oversight. The board consists of Don Basham, Ern Baxter, Bob Mumford, Derek Prince and Charles Simpson, who receive no remuneration for their service on the board. Please use the form found in this magazine to request *New Wine*, for address changes and contributions. All foreign contributions or payments should be made in the form of a check for U.S. dollars drawn on a U.S. bank or International Money Order for U.S. dollars.





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