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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This book is written to the young men in my family: young men who have been subjected to a mode of thinking promoted by our modern-day society for the entirety of their lives; young men who seem to be confused about their manhood and unsure of what's expected of them; young men who are having a tough time leading their families and providing the vision and direction they so desperately need; young men who either have not paid attention to, or did not listen to their father (or father-in-law, as the case may be), or perhaps they did and discerned an example I did not intend.

I am writing to the young men in my family because I am deeply troubled with the world-view that has swept into every aspect of our lives; a world-view that teaches wrong concepts, provides wrong reasoning, and leads its followers ultimately to failure and remorse. For purposes of this work, I am defining the term "world-view" as the current-day, predominant view of society that attempts to ravage traditional values, trivialize God, upset long-standing norms and standards of behavior, and powerfully promotes relativism to the end that there is no transcendent truth, rather all truth is defined by the individual, or the perceived societal majority.

I am writing to the young men in my family because I love them and I fear for their families and for their relationships with God. My credentials are few, consisting of being a father and a grandfather, a man who has made many mistakes, and grieved the Lord, but who loves his children and grandchildren, and wants them to benefit from the lessons God has taught over the years.

I am writing to the young men in my family because I have not been entirely successful in my efforts to be a loving and teaching father. We have had grave problems within our family to include the heartbreak of drug abuse and estrangement. In my attempts to hold our family together, and to present a picture of the perfect American family, which indeed has always been my greatest desire, I have hurt certain members of my family by putting pressure on them to accept the continuing abuse of other members of the family. I have made many mistakes and my heart is at the same time broken and hopeful - broken as a result of lost dreams; hopeful because I know that God is still in charge, and the last chapter of our lives has not yet been written.

Finally, I am writing to the young men in my family because I did not have the influence of a man in my life as a boy and as a young man — no father, uncle, or grandfather bothered much with me. I feel a great sense of loss and remorse over the lack of a dad's influence in my life. It is an emptiness that cannot be filled in this life; a longing that cannot be satisfied; a thirst that cannot be quenched. My father passed away in 1975 of cancer, and I regret deeply that he and I had no real relationship. My father had many good qualities, and he never abused me, but we simply did not have a relationship. He and I were, at best, disconnected. The first time he told me he loved me was on his deathbed. I was thirty-one years old and had a family of my own. Because of my experiences as a

boy and young man, I feel a great need to share my heart with the young men in my family (and young men everywhere).

It is exceedingly important for a father to talk with his children, and to pass on his wisdom and his experiences. A father should let his children know what is important to him and what is important in life. He should talk with them on a deep level. He should be much less worried about being a buddy to his children, and much more focused on being a teacher and trainer, a mentor and an example, and, of course, a provider for the family. He should tell his children that he loves them – often (this, I did often). He should compromise all of the small stuff, but none of the important values of life. He should stand for something, and his children should know without a doubt where their father stands on any issue of importance. And, a father should kiss and hug his children as often as he can get away with it (It gets harder as they get older, you know!).

I am relating these things so that you will know what is in my heart, my motivations, my loss at not having a father (or grandfather) to teach and consult with me, and love me (although my father loved me, I am sure, in a manner he could not express). I don't want my sons or daughter to say the same about me.

The issues I write about in the coming pages need to be discussed and the things I say need to be said. Furthermore, you need to hear these things from someone who loves you. You need to hear them from me! The topics covered in the following pages are deep; they are essential, and they need to be discussed and critically considered. There are other topics of major import not discussed here. I will leave those topics to another time, and I will start with that which is of vital importance to your eternal lives. Now, let's get to it, men... Check your compass and head toward TRUE NORTH; head toward the cross.

part one

RESPONSIBILITY

RESPONSIBILITY

It's drudgery. Someone is always laying responsibilities on me. Do this! Do that! You said you would have that completed by now! I was there to meet you, but you didn't show up! Why didn't you pay the light bill on time? The bank is coming to get the car because you're late with the payment again!

Why can't people just lighten-up, chill? I'll get it all done in my own time. Everyone is so up tight. To tell you the truth, I get fed up with the constant griping. Someone is always deciding what needs to be done, and then assigning the task to me. It gets old! If you want it done so badly, why don't you do it yourself?

You know, the truth is I just forget about all that stuff. I've got a lot on my mind, you know. And sometimes I just don't have time or I'm too tired. I work hard all day and I'd like a little respect and recognition for that. Besides, you'll do it if I don't. I don't have to worry. The griping sure wears on me, though. Just ease up, okay?

Do you know what irresponsible behavior is? It is rudeness and a lack of consideration for others.

Do you know what causes irresponsible behavior? Immaturity! Selfishness! Disregard for others! Laziness!

Do you know what effect irresponsible behavior has on others? It causes people to lose respect for you.

Do you know what effect irresponsible behavior has on you? It causes a loss of self-respect and destroys your vision and ability to lead.

I'm sorry if this sounds harsh, but it needs to be said. I see a growing epidemic of irresponsible behavior among men today. They just won't get the job done. They neither catch the vision, nor establish the goal. They don't plot the progress, nor do they comprehend the destination. The important things that need to be done, the benchmarks of life, the steps to meaningful accomplishment, the recognition of monetary or time constraints, the overcoming of road blocks, the establishment of a family vision, all this seems to be left to others, particularly the women in their lives. Sitting around and not taking the initiative is pandemic among men today. Why? I believe that men have acquiesced their leadership role, are confused as to what is expected of them, and have lost their clear identity as men. I have seen this phenomenon taking place since the early 1960s. Now, I am not blaming this on women. It's our fault, men, and it's up to us to correct it.

Irresponsibility is the child of immaturity. It is an immature mind that does not remember to pay the electric bill, or otherwise do what he said he would do.

It is an immature mind that won't swing into action without the stimulus of a protracted haranguing, pushing, goading, pleading, prodding, reminding, checking and re-checking.

It is an immature mind that gives over vision making, goal setting and the establishment of priorities to others.

It is an immature mind that discards the respect of others along with one's self-respect.

And, it is an unfortunate and immature man who irreverently passes his responsibility to lead to those he is supposed to lead.

You cannot be irresponsible and expect to have anyone's respect, certainly not the respect of the woman in your life. Irresponsible behavior actually creates a social vacuum, and we all know how nature hates a vacuum. You see, when obvious responsibilities go unattended (thus, the vacuum), someone will step up to the plate and swing (thus, filling the vacuum). That someone is usually your wife, or mother, or girlfriend, etc. The problem is that respect is lost when this "stepping up to bat" occurs.

Consider a surgeon who simply could not make a decision during an operation, or who froze during an emergency. Someone would step in and fill the void, but respect would be irrevocably lost.

Consider the teacher who didn't get around to preparing a lesson and failed to grade a major exam. Respect would be lost.

How about the husband who forgot to file the family's federal income tax return, or pay the house payment, or pick up his daughter after band practice. How about the father who promised to take his son to the baseball game on Saturday, but forgot? Irresponsibility is displayed in the man who doesn't do what he said he would do. He simply doesn't keep his commitments.

It makes no difference how big or small, important or insignificant the irresponsible behavior, the hole created by such behavior will be filled by some responsible person who sees a need and fills it - it is the nature of "get-it-done" type people. There are consequences, however. When you allow some other person to carry out your responsibilities, that person and all who are watching lose respect for you. When you are not respected, you cannot establish a vision or provide leadership - nobody will listen or follow. You look silly and insignificant - unmanly.

Respect is of paramount importance to a man. He needs it like flowers need rain. He seeks after it like bees seek nectar. Just as plants cannot grow without the power of the

sun, men cannot operate effectively without the internal empowerment of respect, especially the respect of wives and children. A lack of respect renders a man weak and insignificant, unable to lead and unable to establish a vision. You see, in the absence of a legal requirement to follow, such as in the military, a man can lead only if he is respected. People don't follow or listen to those they don't respect. That is why God has instructed wives to "respect" their husbands, while instructing husbands to love their wives.¹ He who created men knows well that our first need is respect. Furthermore, we men cannot carry out our vision-setting and leadership roles unless we are respected.

There is yet another twist to this general type of behavior that requires discussion. It is a little different than the irresponsible behavior we have been discussing, but it also causes a serious loss of respect. I am talking about the twin respect destroyers of not keeping your word and lying.

Over the past few years, a tremendous men's movement has been taking the country by storm. Bill McCartney, the former head football coach of the University of Colorado Buffaloes, started it. The movement is called Promise Keepers. This powerful movement of Christian men throughout the country is providing an awakening to manhood and a dynamic reminder of our calling and purpose. These vibrant rallies are scheduled for Friday evenings and all day and into the night on Saturday. Upwards of 60,000 men and boys attend these rallies to worship God, hear great speakers, sing hymns, and learn of the solemn calling bestowed upon men. These men are known as Promise Keepers because that is exactly what a man is: a Promise Keeper. Men keep their word. Men do exactly what they say they will do.

Yes, honor is still important and the essence of honor is keeping your word. Trite as it may sound in today's society, a man's word is his bond. If people cannot depend on you to keep your word, they will not respect you. And guess what? You will lose self-respect as well. Failing to keep your word is unmanly and weak. It shows a lack of character, a lack of strength, a lack of conviction, and a tremendous disregard for the person who counted on you, but was let down. Failure to keep your word indicates that you don't have much regard for yourself. If your self-image allows for not keeping your word, and it doesn't really bother you, and if you don't see this as an immoral act, which is degrading and destructive to your self-image, then you are devoid of character. Furthermore, the act of not keeping your word shows blatant disrespect for others. When a man says one thing and does another, he is not worthy of respect and he cannot be counted on - he is not dependable. He is like a leaf blown in the wind - it blows here and then there, up and then down. He lacks character and has no regard for others.

Likewise, lying is a destroyer of respect. Why do people lie? They lie to hide the truth, because the truth hurts or makes them uncomfortable. They lie because they don't regard the truth as important or convenient, or they redefine the truth to make it more manageable. They lie because they don't regard the person they are relating to as worthy of truth or respect. Lying is self-destructive and a relationship destroyer. Like not keeping

1. The Holy Bible, Eph. 5:34.

your word, it is born in a deep lack of character. It shows weakness of mind and a lack spiritual grounding. It is disgusting.

I have noticed throughout the years that those who do not keep their word and who lie are the very ones who complain the loudest when they are on the receiving end of that behavior pattern. They are incensed, embittered, and deeply angered over such treatment. They complain loudly to all who will listen. They proclaim the injustice and demand recompense for the wrong done them. During all this hypocritical wailing, they miss the irony of it all: they demand from others that which they are not willing to give.

Men, keeping your word is important. Telling the truth is important. Character is important. And your reputation is important. These are the attributes of a man. It is not easy to display these character traits, but then it is not easy to be a man. This is where the real strength and power of manhood is displayed, not in lifting weights or drinking beer or fighting, but in being a Promise Keeper. If you find that you cannot display these character traits, then you are not a man. You may be a male of the species, but you are not a man.

Falling into irresponsible behavior, therefore, has dire consequences. As men, we actually cannot fulfill our God-ordained role if we are mired in irresponsibility. This is a serious issue for all men to consider. It's like allowing your canoe to drift down stream in turbulence, without putting an ore in the water. Nothing good will come of it and disaster will eventually be the result. It is a man's job to have his ore in the water at all times, guiding the canoe, avoiding rocks and dangerous rapids, turning here and turning there to bring your family safely to its destination. That's your job! Do it! Take joy in it.

THEREFORE

1. Men are responsible! Boys are irresponsible!
2. Men don't lie. Men keep their word. Men are Promise Keepers.
3. Irresponsible behavior = rudeness and lack of consideration for others.
The cause of irresponsibility is immaturity.
4. Irresponsible behavior causes others to lose respect for you.
5. Irresponsible behavior destroys a man's vision and ability to lead.
6. Irresponsible behavior is the natural consequence of men who have acquiesced their leadership role and lost their clear identity as men.
7. Men need – no, require – respect, especially the respect of the women in their lives.

APPLICATION TO EVERYDAY LIFE

1. Men need respect in order to function as God intended. Wives are commanded by God to respect their husbands. Husbands are commanded to love their wives.
2. A man cannot be respected if he is not responsible, or if he is not a Promise Keeper.
3. Women will lose respect quickly for a man who is not a leader in his family, or is not responsible, or does not keep his word. This is true even if she attempts to fill that role – the role of responsible leader - herself. She will resent that she was put in the position of having to carry out her role and his, too.
4. A man who relinquishes his God ordained role as leader in the family becomes confused, unsure of himself, unsure of what is expected of him, clumsy, and awkward – unmanly. He cannot set the goal. He is not sure where he is going.
5. It is imperative to have dignity and self-respect. Without those attributes, one cannot live a fulfilled life. In order to enjoy the reality of those attributes in your life, you must behave responsibly, keep your word, and tell the truth.

Part two

***AND HE CALLS HIMSELF A
CHRISTIAN?***

AND HE CALLS HIMSELF A CHRISTIAN?

AND SO THE STORY GOES

So many times I have heard it, and so have you. You might have even said it yourself. The story goes something like this: You know a guy (or gal) who openly says that he is a Christian. He might have made the proclamation during a discussion at some point, or perhaps he attends church and sometimes talks about a good sermon or an interesting Sunday school lesson. Or perhaps it was when he declined an invitation to go to a bar or strip joint. It might also be that he is always the designated driver. It seems that no one has ever seen him drunk. What ever it is, this guy seems to get under your skin - just a little bit. He seems to think he's better than the rest of the group. A little too goodie, goodie to suit me. He's not like the rest of the guys. He shies away from the dirty jokes and the fast girls. Last weekend he did a really crazy thing. A clerk at a store gave him change for a \$20 bill instead of the \$10 bill he had actually paid with. Of all the nutty things, he told the clerk and returned the incorrect change. I wonder if Mr. Right would have done the same thing if we had not been there to see?

We all know someone like this. He gets under our skin - just a little bit. But, what about that woman down at the office? She has a Bible in her office and goes to a weekly Bible study for business people. We call her the Bible Lady. She even invites people to church sometimes. She is really annoying - drippy sweet, you know. She even talks openly about Jesus during office hours. Isn't that illegal? She really gets under my skin - a whole lot!

Then there is the chairman of the deacon board at church. He's always telling people what they should do and what they should not do and he always seems to be judging everybody. He makes a big show of reading the Bible - carries it with him everywhere - and he is always the first one to pray, even at a restaurant. It's embarrassing.

Well, all these goodie, goodie types have their faults, too. They are all fakes. I can't stand people who act pious and wear their religion on their foreheads. Religion is a private thing, you know, and it should not be discussed all the time. People have a right to their own beliefs, but they should not try to push their beliefs on others. So-called Christians are the worst. They think it's their personal duty to save the world from hell. I don't even believe in hell. No loving god (with a lower case 'g') would create a place like that, and if he did, he wouldn't send anyone there. That's not love, and no god I know would do such a thing. *[The implication here being that either I know other gods, none of whom would do such a thing, or that other gods exist, although I may not know them. Saying 'no god I know...' is one of the silliest and most shallow statements a person can make.]* Just leave me alone. I have my own beliefs.

Remember good ole Mr. Right - Mr. Goodie, Goodie? Well, guess what...I called him the other night and invited him to go out clubbing with the gang. He was so stinking

pompous that it made me sick. He said that he had to draw the line in his life and that he didn't want to hang with us any more. Guess we're not good enough for him. This guy is too much. He pretends to be so loving and kind, but then he throws his friends out the window. We're not good enough. And he calls himself a Christian?

Remember the Bible Lady? Well, guess what...A friend of mine works with her and he told me that she got caught stealing office supplies from the company and was fired. So much for the Bible Lady. And she calls herself a Christian?

The best of the group, however, is the Deacon. Mr. Pray-at-restaurants apparently had an affair with another man's wife at church. Both families are now getting a divorce, and the deacon and the woman he had the affair with are talking about marriage. This same deacon used to teach Sunday school to young adults. As I remember it, more than one of his classes was about sexual morality. Guess his morality bit the dust. And he calls himself a Christian?

And so the story goes...

What have we learned from the above examples? I suggest the following:

- There can be a total lack of tolerance for Christians. Why?
- There seemed to be a fair amount of jealousy in the above remarks. Why?
- There was a certain delight at the failings and downfall of the three people discussed above. Why?
- The tone of the discussion was much like a debater making a case and taking great pleasure in proving his point. What point? The point was clear: There is no such thing as a good Christian. They are fakes! Why?
- Christians are not forgiven for misdeeds or sins by society in general. Why?

Exactly what were the misdeeds or sins committed above - what category do they fall into? Again, I suggest the following:

- The first example was a misdeed - a perceived social wrong. No laws were broken, but egos were bruised.
- The second situation involved a legal wrong. Clearly laws were broken.
- The third situation involved a moral wrong. Adultery was committed.

Therefore, we have a social wrong, a legal wrong and a moral wrong - all involving professing Christians. Our storyteller makes the point that there is no such thing as a "good Christian," and to prove his point, he relates the above three stories. Our storyteller is also making another powerful point, although he probably does not realize it. He is making the point that Christians sin; therefore, they are not Christians. Likewise, he makes a follow-up point: Christians claim to be perfect, but they clearly are not perfect; therefore, all Christians are hypocrites.

This is a fairly accurate rendering of the world's view of Christians. It might even be your view, although I pray not. Or, you might have had these thoughts in the past, or had these charges made about you. Even Christians find themselves voicing judgments such as these at times. The fact is that the world thinks that Christians think they are perfect, as Jesus is perfect. Accordingly, the world delights in proving us wrong.

With all this in mind, please consider the following non-religious examples having to do with art and music. Good ole non-threatening art and music. Consider the following...

WHAT ABOUT ART

Art is to be appreciated on its own merit: colors, textures, the feeling, the creativity, the type of art (impressionistic, modern, abstract, surrealism, etc.). Art adds so much to our lives: beauty, warmth, personality, decoration, contemplation, imagination, excitement, critical observation, deep appreciation, and so on.

Now, if an artist paints beautifully most of the time, but makes a profound error on a particular painting, you don't denounce art as being without value as a result of an imperfect artist. Do you? You probably would not even denounce the artist, realizing that practicing art and proclaiming to be an artist does not mean that the artist claims perfection, or that he would never make a mistake. You would realize immediately that the incredibly deep value of art goes far beyond the works of a single artist, or even a large group of artists. Art is valuable in its own right; its value is transcendent. Art exists in its own right and as such is justified by its existence. In a theoretical sense, art is perfect. But the practice of art, by imperfect artists, is itself imperfect. This realization, however, in no way detracts from the beauty and perfection of art. And surely this realization would not lead a thinking person to reject art because it is imperfectly practiced by an imperfect practitioner.

WHAT ABOUT MUSIC

No matter your taste - classical, opera, show tunes, hard rock, soft rock, country, ballads, gospel, folk, jazz, easy listening, R&B, and so on - music is the universal language, the language of heaven. Music can be enjoyed even if you don't know anything about it. Why? Because music is experienced; one need not study it academically; one needs only to experience it; one needs only to listen. The beautiful, melodious sounds enter our very soul and bring forth a whole multitude of emotion - peace, joy, agitation, fear, love, sorrow, melancholy. Music also triggers memories of good times and bad. A favorite song can bring back memories of a special time with a special person. We can remember smells, sights, what the person wore, what was said. One can even relive the emotion - love, anger, frustration - upon hearing that certain special song.

Music is an essential component of the human being; it is a quintessential element of life. Music is pleasing to God and essential to His worship. It is unthinkable to attempt to worship God without singing songs of praise. The Bible is full of songs and praises to the Heavenly Father.

Music in its perfect form is available to all who care to listen. Just as people differ widely in taste and preferences, so too does music. It comes in an infinite number of forms. Although music is highly structured and even mathematical in terms of its nature and logical application, and even though there are a finite number of notes, there are an infinite number of combinations available to the creative musician. The gifted composer picks and chooses from this vast array of infinite combinations of musical building blocks to create a work of unique profundity. No matter the nature of his creation, it will surely give great joy to someone, and maybe to multitudes for generations to come.

Therefore, music, like art, has a transcendent nature. It would exist without man because it belongs to God - begotten by Him and sung by the angles.

Now, suppose that a man calls himself a musician and in fact plays an instrument - say, a piano. This person composes marvelous tunes and plays the piano, but on occasion, he composes a terrible tune, one that simply doesn't work; the notes don't associate one with the other. Any composer should know better. And to make things worse, he struck several sour notes just recently while playing a familiar tune. Wow, and he calls himself a musician!

Well, yes, he is a musician, although an imperfect one. He is a composer and musician who sometimes suffers a lapse in musical ability - temporarily losing the basics, you might say.

Given this situation, would you denounce music as unworthy due to the apparent inability of the musician to master it? Would you say, "If that's an example of music, then I want nothing to do with it?" Or, would you instead attack the musician saying that he is no musician and certainly an inadequate composer? Would you react in this manner even if you knew very little about music and what it took to master it? Would you do that or would you readily realize that music has enormous value quite apart from the musician at hand? And concerning his composing abilities, wouldn't you 'cut him some slack,' encourage him to try again and expect that he will improve as he gains experience? What would you do? Perhaps one would be even more charitable if he had never personally attempted to learn or master music. Not many of us on-lookers criticize a Brahma bull rider in a rodeo for falling off after 7 seconds, when we have never attempted to ride a bull at all.

WHAT ABOUT CHRISTIANITY

With the above two examples in mind, why then are Christianity and Christians dealt with so harshly? Why is Christianity so readily rejected due to the imperfect practice of the faith by imperfect Christians? In order to answer this question, we will need to carefully consider the above examples. I do not pretend to have all the answers to anything, and this is no exception, but let's do some analyzing together. Got your thinking cap on?

THE SOCIAL WRONG: Let's look first at the social wrong, starring Mr. Right. In one form or another, this general type of social situation can often be the defining point in a person's life, especially a young person. It is this type of situation that all concerned

parents fear. Parents try their best to teach their children how to handle situations like this. They preach about being a leader, not a follower, and about making your own decisions, rather than following the sheep over the cliff. Yes, I was one of the preachers! I admit it. Why are parents so concerned about their children being involved with the wrong crowd? Why are they so judgmental about their children's friends? Because they are older and much more experienced in life and in dealing with people than are their children. Hard to believe, right? After all, anything a teenager's parents know is currently useless, like a buggy whip. It was useful in the old days, but useless today. After all, parents are sort of like dinosaurs, they had their day, but that day was yesterday. Today is your day, and you know the score. Parents are well meaning, but just don't know how things really are in today's world. They're just not with it! The rules have changed and so have people. If I did as my parents wanted, I'd be the biggest geek in town. Right?

Real Love: As a person grows in experience (which takes time) and wisdom (which is a gift from God), one might come to see things differently. A parent is like one who has run the same maze several times and knows all the wrong turns. A parent is like one flying in a helicopter above a twisting and turning conglomeration of city streets and tall buildings. Because of the perspective, instructions can be relayed to a traveler below who is trying to find his way, or avoid a particular hazard just around the next corner. Added to this experience and perspective is love -- intense, never-ending, powerful, white-hot love. Love is defined as the absolute commitment to do what is best for another; an unwavering, all-consuming interest in the well-being of another; the conscious decision to put the welfare of another above that of your own. Would you like to learn how the Bible defines love? The following is from the 13th Chapter of 1 Corinthians:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

You see, love is not so much a feeling as it is a total commitment to the well being of another. It is not so much a thing one has or feels as it is an attitude of commitment and positive actions toward another. You show love by what you do that is in the best interest of another. This is why love and sex are two different things. Sex is demonstrated by physical self-gratification. Love is demonstrated by the exact opposite of self-interest; it is demonstrated by your actions and words in the interest of others. Now, I have found it to be true that the more I practice true love toward another, that my feelings for that person generally follow my actions, resulting in an increase in affection. But the goal is not to feel

the affection; the goal is to give the love. This is the type of love that Jesus demonstrated for us on the cross.

This is why parents and children are often at odds. The parent is committed to doing what is right for the child, while the child is equating love to letting him do as he wishes, to buying him everything he wants. The child's goal (depending on the age, of course) is to have fun. If my parents love me, therefore, they will do everything in their power to make sure I have fun. If they love me, they will let me do what I want to do. To a child (and, unfortunately, to many adults), love means a commitment to one's happiness. To the parent, love is a commitment to one's well being. Happiness from the eyes of a child (or immature person of any age) is not analogous to one's well being from the eyes of a parent. It is true that parents make mistakes and are not always right. It is likewise true that they make fewer mistakes and are right more often than the child. When a child acts in concert with the wishes of his parents, even if the parents are wrong, God has a way of protecting the child and teaching the parent. It's up to the parents to teach the child and it's up to God to teach the parents.

One Bad Apple: Implicit with the parents' concern about the social pressure demonstrated in the story of Mr. Right is the old adage of "one bad apple spoils the barrel." Have you ever wondered where that saying came from? Well, for one thing, anyone who has ever left a rotten apple in with a bushel of good apples knows that the entire bushel will soon be spoiled if the bad apple is not removed. God also speaks to this in many ways in Scripture. The Bible speaks to the removal of a "bad apple" from the congregation and it speaks to the effects of bad company on one's character:

*Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."*²

I have often wondered why bad company corrupts good character. Why doesn't good character influence bad company? Throughout the years, I have had many unpleasant discussions with my children concerning the company they were keeping. They would always respond in two predictable ways. The first set of arguments went like this: *You're judging him unfairly, Dad. He's really a good guy. You just don't know him. You are being unfair. I thought we weren't supposed to judge others by the way they look or talk.* Now, these were difficult arguments to answer because our perspectives were completely different. We have already discussed that issue.

The second argument was just as predictable: *Dad, why do you always assume that this guy is going to pull me down or lead me into something I shouldn't be doing? Why don't you ever assume that I will be a good influence on him? Why don't you trust me to do what's right no matter who I hang out with?"*

The answer is that I believe the Bible and I trust in my own personal experience. Indeed, bad company corrupts good character. This is part of what was going on with Mr.

² Corinthians 15:33; Holy Bible, New International Version.

Right. He did not want to be corrupted and he had the wisdom to withdraw from the relationship. As I understand it, here is approximately what takes place...

As I look back over my life, I cannot say that I ever had a life changing influence on a person of bad character. I got into trouble several times due to associating with bad character. The bad character won. I also have to admit, that I got several of my friends into big trouble because, at that time, I was the one with bad character. In either case, bad character won. Why is this?

Control: The answer lies within the pressures of society and the innate nature of man. More specifically, the answer lies with the 'C' word: Control. As far as I know, God created two separate species of thinking beings. These beings were capable of making their own judgments and decisions. They were capable of deciding the course of their lives. They were capable of worshiping the one Holy God. They were created with free will, in the image of God, Himself. They were intelligent, thinking beings created by God for his own purposes. You have already figured out that the two species of beings referred to are humans and angels. No other created being has the attributes described above.

The first battle for control happened in heaven, when Lucifer, the most powerful and beautiful angel ever created, rebelled against God and took a contingent of lesser angels with him. We now know him as Satan, the Evil One, and his cohorts are known as demons. He wanted to be like God; he wanted control; he wanted to have the power, worship and majesty possessed by God. He became so possessed with this desire that he mistakenly judged that he could actually unseat the creator God of the universe. He is still trying today. Talk about biting off more than you can chew...Wow!

Since that time, mankind has likewise been battling for control. The Bible is full of such stories. Judas Iscariot was not pleased with the manner in which Jesus was handling His ministry. He, Judas, wanted things done differently. No matter what God wanted. Judas reasoned that he knew better how to handle things, so he took control of the situation and sold Jesus out to the Romans and the Jewish power structure.

In another story, a rich young man came to Jesus and asked what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus looked deeply into his heart and said that there was one thing he lacked and he was told to go and sell everything he owned and give the proceeds to the poor. Jesus went on to invite the young man to be with Him and to follow Him. The rich young man, however, went away sad, for he was very wealthy and could not let go of his possessions, position and wealth. We are left with the impression that he declined the Lord's instruction and invitation to follow Him. He gave up eternal life because he could not do as the Lord had instructed. He ultimately had to be in control, or more accurately, his money was in control of him, and he placed more trust in it than in Jesus.

As I have mentioned elsewhere in this book, if one determines to follow Jesus, then he is no longer in control of his life. The decision to follow Jesus is a decision to turn over control of your life - your eternal life, as well as your earthly life - to the Lord. He is in control. You are not in control. Frightening isn't it? Doesn't sound like much fun, does it?

The truth is that giving up control goes against our human-sin-nature. This problem has existed since the Garden of Eden, when Eve was persuaded by the serpent, Satan, that she could be “like God” and possess all knowledge. In other words, she could be in control. This problem is innate in all thinking creatures created by God - human and angel. If we have free will, it will eventually translate into our desire to control.

When one decides that he will be in control of his own life, then he openly, although not always consciously, I’m convinced, rebels against Jesus the Christ. He makes light of the Christian way. He puts Christians down. He ridicules - sometimes with malevolence, sometimes hauntingly, sometimes with a snicker. He champions the notion of Christian, right-wing intolerance (Intolerant of what? Intolerant of what he, the non-Christian, does.). He promotes the notion that Christians claim to be perfect and good in all ways. He proclaims the snobbery of Christians. *(By the way, the snobbiest people in the world are those losers who have done nothing with their lives and who have never thought deeper than a centimeter, and who claim that anyone who has accomplished goals and achieved purpose is a snob. Losers always seek to put down winners. That is the lowest form of ego gratification.)* Now, this is, to a greater or lesser extent, the thought process going on with our storyteller. Our storyteller is the bad apple. But his bag of tricks is not yet exhausted.

Holier Than Thou: Another reason the bad apple spoils the barrel is that most of us are terrified at being accused of the infamous “holier than thou” attitude, or the “you think you’re better than I am” attitude. Somehow this accusation goes against being an American, and certainly it goes against being a Christian. Of course, in today’s society we have another pitch line: “You are intolerant and bigoted!” When people are doing things they know they shouldn’t be doing, although this knowledge may be at the deepest point in one’s spirit, the best defense mechanism is to accuse those who disagree of being intolerant and bigoted. If you agree with me, you are open, intelligent and tolerant. If you disagree with me, you are, of course, intolerant and bigoted. In this way, the world (our godless society) justifies itself and effectively passes all the responsibility to you, the on-looker. The one performing the acts in question has no responsibility to family, society, God, his children, his friends, or anyone with regard to his actions. His actions are his actions. Somehow you have become the recipient of all the responsibility to accept his actions and to make him feel good about himself. Your job in life is to make him feel good, and to make him feel accepted. If you fail at this considerable task, then you are intolerant and so forth. If you have values, you are not allowed an opinion. The right to an opinion goes to those who have no values, save one: if it feels good, do it, or, my rule is, there are no rules, or, each person can decide right and wrong - there are no absolutes. These people I am describing claim to be super tolerant and wide open to anything - anything goes. Anything that is except one thing: Jesus and the value system that His people espouse.

An enormous amount of pressure, therefore, is put on the Mr. Rights of the world to be one of the guys, cool, laid back, a good friend. To prove this, you must not be rigid and intolerant. To prove you are not “holier than thou” and a snob, you have to lighten up and do the things I do. If you don’t, you’ll make me feel unworthy and humiliated and unloved.

You wouldn't want to be responsible for making me feel badly, would you? Come on, are you my friend or not?

Guilt By Association: This brings me to yet another reason why bad company corrupts: guilt by association. This phenomenon is a fact of life. You can say it isn't fair; you can even refuse to acknowledge it, but that doesn't change the fact of its existence. This type of guilt comes in two forms: (1) assumed, and (2) actual.

Assumed guilt by association comes about as a result of associating with the wrong crowd. The wrong crowd has a reputation all its own, and it is generally well deserved. As much as you would like not to believe it, reputations are generally earned, not given out as a prize. How can you identify the wrong crowd? It's easy. A person or a group of people with a bad, cloudy, or otherwise undesirable reputation constitutes the wrong crowd. This applies to any age group. When this crowd, or anyone within the group, does something wrong - whether it is socially wrong, legally wrong, or morally wrong - then the entire group receives the blame. It is assumed that all members of the group were part of the wrong deeds, or at the very least approved of the actions of the group. In this type of situation, one person can spread the blame to the entire group, or the group can spread blame to each of its members.

Actual guilt by association is much more dangerous and comes about as a result of crushing peer pressure. When you are associating with the wrong crowd, eventually they (the group) will become involved in some type of wrongful activity (social, legal, or moral). Because you are with them, because you want to be accepted as one of the group, and because you see no way out, short of looking like a fool, losing all your friends, being labeled a turncoat, coward, sissy, goodie-goodie, etc., you actually take part in the wrongdoing. Actual guilt by association can, of course, land a person in jail, destroy family relationships, and decimate reputations - both yours and your family's. Yes, guilt by association applies to your family as well. The things you do - good or bad - reflect on your family. Fair or not, that's the way it works.

There is a true and wonderful saying: If you want to know a man, study his friends. You are judged by the company you keep. Again, you can scream to the extent of your lung capacity from the top of Pikes Peak that it isn't fair. People should be judged by who they really are and what is in their hearts, by their true intentions, and not by how they look or who they choose as friends. Go ahead, scream it to whomever will listen, but the fact remains: You are judged by your friends. There are some truths in life you simply have to accept, like gravity and being judged by the company you keep.

Why don't people judge you by who you really are instead of by your friends? The answer is so very simple. You are judged by the company you keep and not by who you really are because people in the community don't know what your true intentions are, or what is in your heart, or what you feel, or how honest you are, or who you really are. These things are deeply personal and known only to you, really. The only way you can be known is to display who you really are by your actions. People in the community know you only by your overt actions. They can only assume that you are the same type of person as those

with whom you associate, and that you agree with their overt actions and philosophies. You see, the community, your family, and your church “more attention pay to what you do than what you say.”

This same fact of life applies to your personal appearance. People can only assume that you are a bum if, indeed, you look like one (if it looks like a duck and walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, then it must be a duck). No need to blame the on-looker, or your neighbor. If you look like a bum, you will most likely be treated like a bum. That’s life! If you dressed like a forest ranger, you would expect for people to assume that you are a forest ranger. If you dressed like a clown, you would expect for people to assume you are a clown, and you would be expected to be funny. Why? Because clowns are funny. If you hang out with the wrong crowd, and if you’re unkept, you can expect to be judged accordingly. Why in the world should that surprise you? How ridiculous to blame the on-looker.

This is why the bad apple almost always spoils the barrel. This is why bad company corrupts good character, just like the Bible warns. The Bible even begins the warning with the words, “Don’t be misled.” This is telling because the bad apples of our lives so often mislead us. We do not want to hurt people or make them feel unworthy. We want to please our friends. Why? Because too much of our self-image comes from the opinions of others. Do you see how deceitful Satan is, how alluring he is, and how he works through people to pull you away from God? Don’t be misled by bad apples.

Imagine being in the scorching desert, in desperate need of water. You come upon a water hole, but alas, the water is contaminated. But being resourceful you assess the situation and determine that this rancid water could be purified if only it had the influence of some fresh water. So happens that you have a small amount of fresh water remaining in your canteen, which you immediately donate to the rancid pool. Now, do you think that the pool turned pure? Or, consider the opposite situation. What if a pure pool were in your path, but someone raced ahead of you and poured a small amount of potent poison into the water. The entire pool would be rendered useless and dangerous. Unless God directs otherwise, the rancid spoils the purity of the larger unit, and a small amount of pure cannot make clean that which is spoiled.

Only God: One final comment about this topic: The reason that you will almost never be the guiding light that turns a bad apple into a good apple, is that only God can change a man’s character. You can’t do it; only God can do that. You can set a good example, and you should. A good example draws a line in the sand to differentiate between right and wrong; proper and improper; good and evil; appropriate and inappropriate, but it doesn’t cause good behavior. The Holy Spirit works in a man’s heart to cause good behavior as he slowly turns his life over to God. In the general society, I see very little correlation between good behavior and good examples. Society is filled with good examples, but just as abundantly displays bad behavior. Look at our prison population, for example. Even parents cannot insure good behavior by exhibiting a good example, although it certainly helps. Only God changes hearts. Know who you are, and then be the person you know.

THE LEGAL WRONG: Our bad apple seems to delight in relating the wrong done by the Bible Lady. She professed to be a Christian, but then was caught stealing. Obviously she is not a Christian. Why? Because Christians claim to be perfect and good. She stole, therefore, she is not good and could not be a Christian.

Did you know that Jesus died for our sins - past, present and future? Just think about it. All of the sins you have committed or will ever commit, were in fact committed after the death of Christ on the cross. With that in mind, which of your sins did He die for: the sins of yesterday, but not tomorrow's sins; the sins committed as a child, but not the adult sins; the lesser sins, but not the ghastly sins? Just which sins did Christ die for? Well, I'll answer that. He died for all your sins - past, present, and future, if you accept Him as your Lord and Savior. If this were not true, His sacrifice on the cross would be insufficient, incomplete, embryonic, lacking, and imperfect. It would be unworthy of God.

Think of the absurdity of God the Father sending His Son to suffer and die on the cross for some of your sins, or for only those sins committed as of the day of Christ's crucifixion. If this were the case, then God failed to make provision for the salvation of mankind, including you and me. What, then, are we to do about the sins that were not atoned for by Christ's death on the cross? Furthermore, how are we to identify those particular sins; how do we separate sins atoned for from those not atoned for? Even worse, how do we know if Christ atoned any of our sins for? If Jesus paid the price for some of our sins, but not necessarily all of our sins, and if we can't positively identify which sins are which, then perhaps none of our sins are forgiven. This being the case, mankind is in deep trouble, and each of us is on his own. Yes, on your own to earn heaven; on your own to define right from wrong; on your own to define morality; on your own to define God; on your own to define His message, and on your own to interpret that message. In a manner of speaking, you have become God because you are doing all the defining, interpreting and deciding -- you and six billion other people on planet Earth. Each person can then define and create his own God and his own religion, and it can be done in his own image. This is Humanism run rampant. This is the type of thinking Satan wants to lead you into. It's a quagmire of illogical thinking, and an intellectual abyss with no bottom and no reasoned foundation.

Such an incomplete plan of salvation could only come from an inept and imperfect God. But our God is not inept and He is perfection. If you accept Him as Lord and Savior, and if you confess with your mouth your belief in Him, you will be saved and spend eternity in Heaven. God will look at you through the saving blood of Jesus - sort of like looking through magic glasses that see only the righteousness of man, and are blind to the dirt and sin.

Don't be deceived by the Evil One, who works so effectively through your guilt and shame. And don't be deceived by how you feel -- you many or may not feel forgiven. Believe only in God's word (the Bible). He gave His word. You are saved and you are forgiven.

Christians are not perfect, nor do they claim to be perfect. Christians are differentiated by one thing only: they are SAVED. Christians commit sins. They don't want to sin and they are perhaps more sensitive to sin than others might be, but they sin nonetheless. Why? Because of our sin nature, which found its beginning in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve decided to rebel against God. Christians are human beings and, as such, are subject to mistakes and sin.

The Bible Lady story does point out how careful we must be to protect our reputations and the reputation of Jesus. People are watching and waiting to broadcast the sins of Christians. They are waiting to belittle the person of Christ. As discussed above, if you can put down the shining light of Christianity, the target of perfection, then one can perhaps convince himself that this religious stuff is all a bunch of bunk anyway, not to mention being totally unrealistic. If one is successful in his attempts to justify his life in this way, which is to say that he is systematically destroying his conscience, then he might feel better about himself, at least in the short run.

The Bible Lady thus provided a great opportunity for our storyteller to reinforce his loathing for Christianity and to belittle the foolish and narrow minded who seem to adhere to its precepts. A great example of "I told you so." Our story teller can then go on doing the things he normally does, and he can go on being whatever he is because there is no mirror of Christianity to hold up before him. When he looks in the Bible Lady's mirror, he sees only himself as he is, instead of himself as Jesus wants him to be.

THE MORAL WRONG: Remember Mr. Pray-at-restaurants? He was a church deacon, a leader and a Sunday school teacher. He taught a certain moral code and he professed to believe in it. He was probably a bit haughty in attitude and preachy in approach. This is common to one who feels that he has made it, so to speak. Here I am speaking about one who feels that he has arrived spiritually; he feels invulnerable to sin, above the struggling hoards of the common man. This attitude, which happens to Christians and non-Christians alike, provides the building blocks for the insidious disease of pride. When pride sets in, the fields are ready for a harvest of sin, having been fertilized by accomplishments, flattery, or the like. Unfortunately, Mr. Pray-at-restaurants fell prey to sexual sin, the worst kind of sin for people who openly espouse religious beliefs. *[By the way, I see nothing wrong with praying at restaurants, just in case you're wondering; unless, of course, the prayer is born of the wrong motives, like a public demonstration of one's goodness or religiousness.]*

I am now going to share with you an incontrovertible truth: Society will forgive any mistake, legal or otherwise, or any sin in one's life, with the exception of moral sin. Not only that, when one has sinned morally and been found out, family, friends and acquaintances will no longer listen to the penitent with regard to moral issues. He will not be allowed to express opinions on moral issues, or to teach morals to children. He will not be listened to in terms of how to avoid moral sin. Somehow he is forever different, forever stained. Somehow he is in a hole from which he cannot be extracted, in a cloud he cannot rise above.

This is an odd and unique reaction when closely analyzed. For example, if a man were to rob a bank, but then fully own up to his wrong and even serve time in prison, his warnings against a life of crime would be sought after and respected; he could speak to teenagers in a school assembly; he could give a testimony in church; he could possibly write a book. But when a moral wrong is committed, things are never really the same. People don't let it go. You never quite get your reputation back to its former level. You lose credibility and the right to speak about morality. This is very unfair, to say the least, but it is very true. This type of treatment is also decidedly un-Christian. When an adulteress was brought before Jesus, the crowd wanted to stone her to death. They challenged Jesus concerning the law in such cases. Jewish law was certain and it was clear: an adulteress was to be stoned to death. The Jewish power structure was sure they would catch Jesus on this one. They fully expected Him to command that she be released, but He instead confounded them. He said to the crowd:

"If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." At this, the crowd began to disperse until only Jesus and the woman remained.

Jesus then asked the woman: "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."³

Well, this is the way Jesus reacts to our sin, but he also warns us of the devastating effects of immorality:

"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body."⁴

Now, why is it that with any other sin, one's admonitions against his past behavior are welcomed and believable? The mistake can be put aside and if anyone wants to know how to avoid getting hooked on illegal drugs, for example, just go to the fellow who got hooked; he learned the hard way. But if you want to know how to avoid moral sin, go to the one who has never committed such sins, not the one who fell to the temptation, for he has no credibility. Why?

I don't know why people react the way they do to immorality. I do know that God warns us to "flee from sexual immorality,"⁵ and I do know that such sin affects us in some special way. The scripture tells us that *"All other sins a man commits are outside his body,*

³ John 8:1-11, NIV.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 6:18, NIV.

⁵ Ibid.

*but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.*⁶ Somehow, immorality affects our own body; we actually sin against our own body; it's a personal sin perpetrated on ourselves. The exact effect on our bodies can be obvious, as in the case of disease, or hidden from view, as in the case of a defiled self-image. The effects might also be in the form of a devastated reputation and the loss of friends and family.

Because of Mr. Pray-at-restaurant's fall into pride, it appears that he plunged into the worst sin possible to the non-Christian on-looker. The Deacon proved conclusively to our storyteller that all Christians are alike: they say one thing and do another; they pretend to be pious, but in reality are devious and mean-spirited.

And so the story goes...

Young men, listen to me. Christians are just people trying to do the best they can with the maturity and wisdom they have at the time. Christians do not claim to be perfect or the equal of Jesus. They try to improve and to be like Jesus, but often are misunderstood and maligned. A Christian may or may not do more good works than a non-Christian (although he certainly should), and they are subject to mistakes and the commission of sin, just like anyone else. We are all on our way to a better understanding, a deeper maturity, a more practiced faith, a greater knowledge of scripture and the God who inspired it. We have not arrived; we are on the way. Please do not expect the wisdom, knowledge, experience, style, demeanor, poise, or sweet spirit and caring of the Pope or Dr. Billy Graham in every Christian, especially new Christians. We all have so very much to learn. We are imperfect human beings who have given our lives and trust to the one Holy God of the universe, but in so doing, we did not undergo an immediate metamorphosis, which changed us into the perfect song, the perfect painting, or the perfect Christian. We have instead begun the journey, hand in hand, with Jesus, the living Son of God. This is what differentiates a Christian, and one thing more: he is saved.

You won't like or admire every Christian. Guess what? God doesn't judge a person's Christianity by the degree of your admiration. I know that's a shocking revelation. After all, how could a person be a Christian if he doesn't live up to your image of a Christian? I don't know, but you could ask Judas. He had the same problem when Jesus didn't live up to his image of a Messiah. Don't judge people in terms of their eternal salvation; however, you have the right and responsibility to judge their acts. God gave you a brain and a measure of wisdom so that you can make reasonable judgments about good company or bad company. God, however, judges their hearts (i.e.: the truth in their spirits). Surely you can afford the same consideration to Christians that you would give to the musician, who sometimes hits a sour note, or to the artist, who sometimes gets the perspective wrong.

It deeply troubles me when people - some people - who claim to be Christians are repelled by those who talk about Jesus, their faith, or Christianity. This type of "non-proclaiming Christian" seems to be totally turned off by any mention of Christ or His

⁶ *ibid.*

ministry. They are put off by those who openly and often talk about church, or God, or who pray in a public place. The non-proclaiming Christian believes that religion is a private thing, not to be discussed or displayed. The proclaiming Christians are thought to be hypocrites and braggarts and insincere, wearing their religion on their respective shoulders.

This to me is sickening and assaults the intelligence of every Christian. Tell me, how can you really believe in Christ as Savior and not talk about it? How can this greatest story ever told be relegated to just one hour on Sunday morning? How can one really believe that he has been snatched out of the jaws of hell and deposited in the perfection of Heaven and not talk about it? How can you not mention the fact that another person took your eternal punishment and was tortured to death for you, and that, that other person was God, Himself? How can one read and believe the Bible and not want to share its message? You see, if a person really believes all this, then he can't help but talk about it. People who don't want to discuss things of Christ, should reexamine their faith.

Having said all this, you must also remember that you are being watched constantly. By whom? You are being watched by friends, acquaintances, co-workers, family members, deliverymen, your barber, the bus driver, your pastor, your enemies -- you are being watched. Why? People want to know if you are real. They want to know if you can be counted on. They want to know if you do what you say, or if you just talk a good show. And most of all, they want to know if the One you know is worth knowing. Did you know that God advertises His love through you? That's right, so be mindful of where you hang out, and with whom you associate, and what you do. Know who you are, and then be the person you know.

THEREFORE

1. In general, there is a decided lack of tolerance toward Christians.
2. Some people delight in the failings of Christians.
3. Society in general does not forgive the mistakes and misdeeds of Christians.
4. Christians are generally considered to be right-winged zealots, not given to thoughtful discourse or a reasoned and measured approach.
5. It is thought that Christians consider themselves to be “good” or even “perfect,” as Jesus is perfect.
6. The people making all these judgments have two things in common:
 - a. they are not Christians, and, therefore, know very little about the faith they judge; and
 - b. they simply cannot tolerate people who

are always judging others, although they preach tolerance above all other human attributes.

(Interesting, huh?)
7. Bad company corrupts good character. Why?
 - a. Man wants to be in control.
 - b. Man does not want to obey an unseen God (and perhaps not one who is seen).
 - c. No one wants to be accused of being “holier than thou,” or thinking he is better than someone.
 - d. We don’t want to reject people and hurt them.
 - e. Guilt by association.
 - f. Only God can change a man’s character.
8. Society rejects the notion of absolutes - except that there are absolutely no absolutes. (Again, interesting, huh?)
9. Society wants to catch Christians in their imperfection so that it can belittle them and the Christ they serve. Society has to belittle Jesus, or else it will have to deal with His Lordship.
10. Sexual sin is different; it is deadly and personal and its effects are long lasting.
11. You are being watched. Know Who You Are!
12. You are God’s advertisement for His love.

Application to Everyday Life

1. Know what you believe and who you are and don't back down, back off or back out. Stand firm. Know who you are!!
2. Remember that God loves you, but He also loves those you despise. He wants you to be like Him. He wants you to love His people.
3. When you find yourself thinking you are the smartest guy in town, and, of course, have it all together, remember that pride will destroy you and make you fall. Measure how much you know against how much God knows. That ought to help keep your perspective on target.
4. Follow the Truth, not society.
5. Associate with people of good judgment and character. (Yes, it's okay for you to make these judgments about the acts of others.) Run away from people of bad character. Don't be deceived; bad company corrupts good character.
6. Do not be deceived by Satan and his society. Moral sin is different and it is deadly. Sexual sin is like spilling indelible ink on a white shirt. The spot may fade over the years, but it is always there, and you have to wear that shirt every day. By the way, Jesus is really good at getting stains out.
7. Set a good example for others and protect God's reputation. You are His "Poster Boy."

part three

***TRUTH, RELATIVISM, AND
TOLERANCE***

TRUTH, RELATIVISM, AND TOLERANCE

One of the most horrifying dangers in our society is that of relativism. As a philosophy, it has probably been around since the beginning of mankind. As far as I can tell, however, it reared its ugly head once again in our society in the 1960s and has steadily planted a tap root in the minds and consciousness of an entire generation.

As a world philosophy, relativism can be defined as perceived truth seen through the eye of the beholder; opinion sanctified; the absence of absolutes in behavior, morality, or religious belief; it can even become a metaphor for truth — the maxim which defines behavior. Relativism is the essence of being neither here nor there. It transcends philosophy and rises to the level of religion — a world view religion. As a religion, it rejects the concept of Truth (*Truth — with a capital 'T' = that mutually exclusive thing that stands out from among all the rest as perfectly conforming to reality; that thing that 'is,' as opposed to 'might be,' that thing that is strictly genuine and perfectly conforming to the highest standard; that thing that transcends all else and shows itself to be exactly as claimed; that thing that is absolutely and singularly correct*), for every person defines his own truth. It becomes one's inalienable right to define, and re-define when convenient, truth. What is true for me is not necessarily true for you. Truth, after all, is nothing more than a preference — my preference. Each person must define his own truth, not being held captive to narrow thinking and fundamentalist concepts of transcendent Truth. If truth is as the relativists say, then indeed there are no absolutes and no transcendent Truth. Every man and woman, boy and girl, must define a comfortable truth for their own use as a defining foundation. And by all means, it should be comfortable. This right to define, and re-define, and then re-define again, truth is necessary to the world view, otherwise one would have to deal with 'the Truth' and its source — the purveyor of all Truth.

At first glance, this world religion - relativism - has some appeal. It seems to promote tolerance in an intolerant world. It seems fair and forgiving, and open to the opinions of others. It seems to offer respect to others (in much the same way that an undeserved gift is given), especially those who might disagree, or see things in another light, or from a subset of differing experiences. It appears modern and 'with it,' open to all sorts of people and their attending beliefs and opinions. It is, above all, tolerant, and politically correct in today's society.

Tolerance is the sinister sister of relativism. To tolerate means to permit, without protest or interference; to endure; to allow. In our society the definition goes even further, to the point of *embracing* any and all belief structures that come along. When we embrace something, we encourage it, sort of like watering and fertilizing a plant. Synonyms for embrace include: adopt, espouse, and incorporate. This embracing of virtually anything that comes along takes the heat off of our own misdeeds, which we likewise expect to be fully acceptable to others. *I want to do what I want to do, and I am willing to accept anything you do if that's what it takes to reflect the focus and assuage the judgment of others concerning me and my behavior.*

Philosophies related to relativism and tolerance, in one form or another, has been around a long time. The Apostle Paul had to deal with similar philosophies while on his missionary journeys. Adherents to these complementary philosophies were called Epicureans and Stoics⁷. The Epicureans were disciples of Epicurus (341 - 270 BC), who abandoned as hopeless the reasoned search for Truth. In place of Truth, Epicurus and his followers decided to pursue pure pleasure through experience. Pleasure became a metaphor for Truth. In other words, if it feels good, do it. Does this sound familiar?

The Stoics, on the other hand, were disciples of Zeno (336 - 264 BC). This philosophy was founded on the premise of absolute human self-sufficiency and self-repression. It is my belief that today's Humanists find their ancestral roots in ancient Epicureanism and Stoicism. Mankind just keeps replaying the same old tunes.

Relativism and its sinister sister, tolerance, are taught as dogma in our public schools, encouraged in the halls of government, required in large corporations (if you want to get that promotion), clubs, and associations of all types. It has become the mode of thinking of the intelligent, the educated, the worldly, and the sophisticated. If one is not tolerant of other belief structures, regardless of how bizarre they might be, then he is considered narrow minded and unwilling to live and let live. He would also be considered judgmental, mean-spirited, and the arrogant proclaimer of all Truth. The world today does not condone the judging of the actions or philosophies of another. If judging of actions were encouraged, then our own actions would come into question, and that would be unfair (who are you to judge me?). In the religion of relativism, there can be no judging because to do so assumes that the judge, self appointed as he may be, is in a position to decide better or worse, right or wrong, proper or improper, attractive or unattractive.

Black, Gray, and White Smoke

Allowing the judging of moral values brings the relativist face to face with yet another problem. Before getting to the problem, however, let's be clear on the meaning of moral values. When using the term "moral values," I am referring to all things which have to filter through and be dealt with by our conscience. A conscience is like a super-sophisticated smoke detector, always testing the air inside our hearts for the faintest hint of smoke (sin) in our lives. Not only does this smoke detector test the air for the heavy, black smoke, such as is produced by adultery, lying, murder, rape, assault and battery, stealing and other obvious wrongs against society, but it also tests for gray and even white smoke. Only the smoke detectors with new batteries and clean connections can even hope to detect the gray or white smoke. This light shade of smoke passes through the sensing devices of most smoke detectors without setting off the alarm. The light shades of smoke are present in all our lives and can be devastating.

7. Definitions taken from the New Scofield Study Bible, NIV, p. 1156.

What do the lighter shades of smoke consist of? To start with, the wrong things you do when no one sees you and no one will ever know you did them. Character is that which you do when no one is watching and no one will ever know of your actions. Light smoke is the gossip which harms, sometimes irrevocably, the reputation of another. Light smoke is the lie you tell because it's convenient; the incorrect change you did not return; the refusal to admit you are wrong and may have hurt someone. Light smoke hides in the shadows and jumps out at us when we ignore the needs of another, or cause stinging pain and hurt feelings. And the really white smoke appears when we lie to ourselves: *I didn't do anything bad enough to worry about. He shouldn't be so sensitive. I didn't do anything that could be considered sin. I didn't lie about what I said, he just misunderstood me.* The deceiving of one's self with little lies, the attempt to convince ourselves of our perfection or lack of duplicity, the refusal to admit our pride, arrogance, and sinful nature is the beginning of the death of our conscience (smoke detector).

The moral values I am referring to encompass all these things and more. Moral values aren't so much actions as they are attitudes. They are not so much the act of stealing, but the injustice of taking the possessions of another, who had worked and paid for them. Moral values are not so much the act of speaking a lie, but the hurt of breaking the bond of trust between two people. They are not so much the refusal to give of your resources to one who is needy, but the shame of festering greed, growing like a cancer in the heart of a man. The core immorality in all these examples is that the perpetrator simply doesn't care about the affects of his actions on others. Morality is pure and sweet and pleasing to God; immorality is everything else.

Judging Moral Issues

Now, back to that other problem confronting the relativist when faced with judging moral issues. If one judges moral issues, then there has to be a platform from which to undertake the judgment; a platform recognizable to all thinking people by its logical credibility. There is necessarily an assumption of transcending values, a sense of right and wrong to which all should ascribe, an obvious conclusion and, yes, a higher Truth giving meaning and credibility to the judgment.

Herein lies the problem. The relativist cannot allow himself to judge moral issues because he then finds himself face to face with a concept he cannot accept: higher Truth, or in fact Truth in any form. If one judges moral issues, then one must do so from a platform of transcending Truth; Truth which is greater than that of any one man or group of men. With this in mind, the relativist finds himself considering, ever so slightly, the possibility of God... and that is wholly unacceptable.

You see, if every moral question is relative (i.e.: every person defines morality in his or her own terms), then there is no transcendent Truth. Such Truth would be impossible, for if transcendent Truth (absolute Truth greater than man, therefore, defined by one greater than man, for man cannot create a thing greater than himself) existed, then relativism would be invalid as an ideological platform. Truth and relativism cannot coexist

in the same person at the same time. Each, by its definition, is mutually exclusive. Only one of the two ideological platforms is valid, and the other is not. If Truth exists, then relativism is invalid. If relativism is valid and justifiable, then Truth cannot exist. One or the other, not both. Two diametrically opposed philosophies cannot co-exist in a single logical thought pattern.

The position of the relativist is that Truth does not exist — that is, singular, exclusive, transcendent Truth. They would argue that they do accept truth (with a lower case ‘t’), but that each person must define his/her own truth. This, of course, is NOT Truth at all. Truth cannot be manipulated, adjusted, tweaked, changed, molded, altered, modernized, modified, mutated, recast, reorganized, revised, transformed, or edited. Truth just is! It is singular, immutable, perfect, demonstrable, God given, and God defined.

Relativism is, however, a comfortable orientation. Every man and woman defines his or her own truth. If there is no absolute, transcendent Truth, then there is no God, for only God could define or proclaim such infallible Truth. This is the ultimate example of godless humanism. It is clear to all mankind that if there is a God, then He would represent Truth, a Truth that transcends any puny attempt by mortal man to emulate. But since the relativist does not believe in God (if he did, he would have to deal with Him), then there can be no absolute Truth, only the truth as each person defines it, that labyrinth of twisted and defective logic, molded to fit the nefarious nature and carnal desires of the natural man. Consequently, the relativist cannot judge moral issues, because that would be tantamount to recognizing the existence of Truth, and by default, God. Therefore, if it feels good, do it. *As long as it doesn't hurt me, it's okay. Who am I to judge the moral values or positions of another? I have no platform from which I can judge. My truth is no greater than that of any other man.* Accordingly, tolerance is the goal and this type of tolerance takes no stand on any moral issue, with two exceptions: (1) there is no God; and (2) there is no absolute Truth. About this, the relativists are certain. Relativists absolutely believe that there are no absolutes (and the absurdity of this position escapes them). There is nothing more pernicious to a relativist than the belief in God or absolute Truth. There is nothing so threatening as these two concepts. About these two concepts, the relativist does not equivocate. The relativist does NOT consider a belief in God or Truth to be legitimate, and thereby occupying a place equal to his own beliefs. Furthermore, the relativist does NOT and will NOT tolerate the Christian position, although he may well accept any other faith or religious belief. This extreme liberal and eclectic point of view can accept, it appears, anything the world has to offer...except the conservative point of view. The conservatives, of course, are slandered by the liberals for their myopic view of morality and life in general.

The Dispenser of Truth

On the other hand, if there is such a thing as absolute Truth, then there must be an absolute power to dispense it, for man is not great enough or wise enough to create it or dispense it. Such a Truth could not be dispensed by any mortal. That would be illogical. How could any one man or woman possess ultimate and absolute Truth. That ability in itself would be godlike. If there is such a thing as Truth, then there exists a dispenser of

Truth and that being must necessarily be greater than any man. Again, no man can create a thing greater than himself. By way of logical thought, everything that is created is somewhat inferior to its creator. It is impossible to create anything that in its final form exceeds the intelligence or abilities of its creator. Something inferior cannot create something superior to itself. Not even God can create a being greater than Himself.

Is there a dispenser of Truth? Yes, He is God! Only God can determine Truth and dispense it to mankind. Anything else is not Truth because it changes from person to person, from time to time, from society to society, from age to age, and from circumstance to circumstance. Truth, on the other hand, real Truth, is immutable, coming from a supreme being who is likewise immutable. Things that change are not Truth. If something previously claimed to be Truth subsequently changed, then its prior form could not have been Truth, for Truth is ageless and cannot change. If something is True, then it cannot later become false, or in its original form it was not True to begin with. Truth transcends the ages and is the yardstick by which all men and all societies are measured. It is the measuring stick, and a measuring stick does not change, or else it is not a measuring stick.

If, then, there exists a dispenser of Truth, and if that dispenser is the Lord God, then how would He dispense His absolute Truth? Does it make sense that He would dispense Truth so that it would differ from man to man, society to society, circumstance to circumstance? Does it make sense that God would dispense Truth so that it would be misunderstood and potentially interpreted differently by every human being on earth? Does it make sense that the one and only almighty God would be vague, inexact, approximate, ambiguous, and obscure in His pronouncement of Truth? If so, then it must be the goal of God not to bring us to Himself, but rather to confuse us and confound our feeble attempts to discover Him and please Him and obey Him. If this were the case, then we would have to conclude that God does not love his creation. You do not love that which you wish to confuse and confound. Furthermore, if this were the case, then there would once again be no Truth, because it would be indiscernible and beyond our grasp. And if Truth is indiscernible and beyond our grasp, then it doesn't exist. It doesn't exist because we cannot get to it, or identify it, or experience it. So, for all practical purposes, it doesn't exist. We then find ourselves once again in an illogical position. God is perfection and He is love. If this is true, then He is the dispenser of Truth, and the Truth so dispensed will be sharp, crystalline, lucid, and articulate. It will sting like a wasp and you will know it in your spirit. God's Truth could not differ from man to man, or we would be right back where we started with relativism.

Truth is Absolute

Truth, by its very nature, is absolute. A thing is either true or it is not. There is no such thing as "partly true" or a "half truth". If something is partly true, then part is true and part is not. In the case of a half truth, 50% is false. Truth transcends mankind. Man cannot determine Truth on his own because he is not above himself and he has no moral platform from which to make supreme judgments. To think that man can and should make such judgments and ultimately decide right and wrong is an unmistakable statement of

atheism and humanism: atheism because the concept of a transcendent God is rejected; and humanism because man, himself, becomes his own god. Truth comes from a source higher than man — the place all absolutes come from. If there is no Truth, then there is no God. God could not exist in a creation without Truth. How could there be a God with no Truth? If such were the case, one could not state, truthfully, that there was a God. There would be no Truth of God. Do you not see? Truth and God are inseparable; they are one and the same; you cannot have one without the other. If Truth exists, then there is a God to define it and dispense it. This is why truth (with a lower case 't'), as defined by humankind, makes man his own god (with a lower case 'g').

We discussed the immutable nature of Truth, for if it were to vary, it would not be Truth. With that concept in mind, consider the ways in which society redefines Truth with nearly every generation. If Truth were defined by man, then we would have to accept the holocaust as Truth. Hitler's society defined Truth in terms of the Jews being the cause of all human ills. We would also have to accept the atrocities of Stalin's Russia as Truth. In our own country, the Supreme Court allows capital punishment, then disallows it, then allows it again. Which is Truth? The high court first does not tolerate abortion, then it becomes the law of the land and federally funded. Which is Truth? Gambling is wrong and against the law, except when sanctioned by the government, as with lotteries or the open gambling in Las Vegas. Which is Truth? Homosexuality was against the law of the land, and now special rights are being granted to homosexuals, which then serves to encourage and legitimize that activity. Which is Truth? For all of history, same sex marriages were inconceivable, not tolerated in society and against the law. Now, some states are voting on legalizing the union of two people of the same sex as a legitimate marriage. Which is Truth? The examples are unending. Societies change and as they do, they redefine Truth. If Truth gets redefined, then it is not Truth, it is something else. Mankind cannot determine Truth, or morality; only God can do that.

I believe that Truth exists because it's logical and makes common sense, and because I believe that God exists. For example, in the natural sciences, absolute Truths abound and are often referred to as laws: the law of gravity, for example. The relativists and the tolerant accept without quarrel the absolute Truths of science, although their acceptance has always been a puzzlement to me in that the order of the universe and the many laws under which it operates cannot be duplicated by man, as the scientific method requires, and, therefore, lead one to an inescapable conclusion: a higher power than man was responsible for creation, and this higher power is called God. I can only posit that the Truths of nature are not of a moral character and are, therefore, not threatening.

If there are natural laws (absolute Truths) governing the sciences and the make-up of the universe, then why not accept that there are absolute Truths governing moral values and man's conscience. And while on the topic of man's conscience, where did it come from? If there is no Truth and consequently no God, why does every human being (who is not insane or a sociopath) have a conscience, and why do they basically operate from a common code of ethics? For example, most people with reasonably healthy minds can readily agree on a basic moral code: stealing is wrong, murder is wrong, adultery is wrong,

one should honor his contracts and commitments, etc. Mankind seems to come pre-coded with a basic moral standard. Where did it come from?

I see God's perfect Truth everywhere, governing every minuscule part of His creation. If God applied His laws and Truth to the governance of the universe, then surely He would apply His Truth to his human creation, His most precious creation of all, the one for whom He sent His Son to die. He even applied Truths to the animal kingdom. Each different type of animal comes pre-coded with certain knowledge, methods of gathering food, mating, taking care of their young, dealing with aggression, and so on. We call this pre-coded knowledge instinct. Where did it come from if not the creator? Plants likewise are pre-coded with their own set of Truths. Why then are humans the only creation flying on their own, with no absolute Truths, no pre-coding and no creator?

I further believe in Truth because it is real and recognizable to me. If one can clearly and unequivocally recognize a thing, then it exists. When I see Truth exhibited or when I hear it spoken, I know in the depth of my soul that it is real and I immediately recognize it. That knowledge was somehow implanted in me, and in all of mankind. Because of man's sinful nature, he may not admit to the Truth, but nevertheless he knows Truth when he sees it or hears it (still assuming a healthy mind, of course). Sometimes the Truth hurts and we want nothing to do with it, but we still recognize it as Truth. Often we want to avoid it, turn from it and reject it, but we still know in the deepest regions of our hearts that we were confronted with Truth.

Another interesting dichotomy is that today's society rejects Truth but then relentlessly seeks it through the court system, where witnesses must swear that they are telling the truth. It seems that the Truth about what happened is safe ground, while the Truth about life and moral values is not. However, while serving on a jury recently, I found that one of the requirements of jury service was to be of "good moral character." I wonder how that is defined?

Truth is immutable, absolute, and God defined and dispensed. Man cannot define or dispense Truth because no man can possess that degree of correctness. Truth cannot come from man because Truth is greater than man, and man cannot create a thing greater than himself. The creator is always greater than the created. Therefore, if man were to define truth, as he claims, then the truth he defined would be less than himself, thus not Truth, for Truth must transcend man, or it is not Truth and it is of no enduring value. Furthermore, if truth comes from man, then it is, by its nature, mutable. If a thing is mutable, it cannot be Truth, for transcendent Truth is, by its character and nature, immutable. If all Truth comes from God, and we agree that God dispenses His Truth in a constant and succinct fashion, how then does He do it? Here's where the Bible comes into the discussion.

The Holy Scriptures

The Holy Scriptures (the Bible) are the written record of Truth, as inspired by the one true God of all creation. The Bible is the immutable record of God's Truth. God has chosen to commit His Truth to writing so that we humans can refer to it and get it straight. He did not leave the communication of His Truth to stories passed down over the ages, for He well knew that stories passed from one person to another change enormously and the Truth can be lost, becoming nothing more than an amorphous glob of competing stories. Our Lord chose to inspire a few chosen men to communicate His immutable Truth throughout the ages. He wanted us to get it right. The Bible is the only written record of:

**God's thinking
His heart
His opinions
His desires for us
His anger at our misdeeds
The history of all creation
His gift of salvation through Jesus, the Christ
The nature and character of Jesus
The major tenants of the Christian faith
Our eternal punishment should we reject His gift
What He considers pleasing and good to Him
Transcendent moral values
Right and wrong
Divine wisdom**

The Bible is the only source of knowledge of God. It is the only way we have to accurately pass down to our children the unassailable Truths of the Living God. It is our source of 'real' wisdom; wisdom that comes from the one who possesses all wisdom and who wishes to dispense it to those who ask. The Bible is our record of the ancestry of the human race.

The Bible is all of this and more, yet most don't read it. One could reason: If I really believed that God is who He says He is, wouldn't I want to know what He has to say? Wouldn't I seek out His direction and wouldn't I want to know what pleases Him? Think about that. How is it reasonable that anyone could be disinterested in reading a book written to him by his creator; a book containing Truths for his ears? Wouldn't I want to grow and mature in the faith? Wouldn't I want to know the heart of Jesus, if, indeed, He is my Savior? How could it be that I wouldn't want to know these things?

It seems there are four possible answers to that question: 1) you don't believe in God; 2) you don't believe the Bible is the true and inspired word of God; 3) you are a believer and accept the truth of the Bible, but you don't want to deal with its instructions and commandments; or 4) you are too lazy, or too busy to read the Holy Scriptures.

As to the first possibility, I can only pray that you will come to believe in and know the one true God of all creation.

As to the second possibility, and assuming you are a believer, I encourage your further investigation into the Truth of the Bible. Consider again the above list of information found in the Bible. This is the only source of this type of God-centered information and directives. The only source! You cannot find this type of information anywhere else. The Bible is the exclusive source! Additionally, think through your position. Are you saying that God left an imperfect message for His people? Or, are you saying that He left no message at all – sort of putting us on our own to learn about Him? Do either of these positions make sense to you, really?

People I talk to about the Bible are too often quick to say that it was written by mere man, and mankind is given to error; therefore, the Bible contains errors. When I hear that, I always ask the speaker to be so kind as to point out those errors so that I can know they are present and properly investigate them. I have yet to have anyone provide such a list. Truth is, these critics have not read the Bible and don't really know what it contains. Saying that it is full of errors is simply an excuse for not reading it and dealing with it. How would one know if errors existed without a careful study of the Scriptures? How foolish people appear when they proffer unfounded opinions.

Another objection I often hear about the Bible is that it was fine for biblical times, but this is today and many things have changed. The Bible, they say, was written thousands of years ago and was probably useful for the people of those times, but certainly it is irrelevant for modernity.

Again, I have found that those espousing this opinion have likewise not read the Bible. Furthermore, if one is a believer in the power and majesty of God, His omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience, how is it logical to assume that He would inspire the writing of a work that would soon be outdated, not to speak of riddled with error? What sense does that make? Would God actually produce the record of His word for all peoples — past, present and future — only to have it obsolete for all but those who lived contemporaneously with its writing?

Certainly, the stories of the Bible are told from the perspective of the times, but the Truths are forever. Truth and morality do not change from year to year, or generation to generation, as our society would have us believe. God is sovereign and He is perfection. He therefore does not change His mind from time to time. If He were to change His mind, He must either be incorrect in His first pronouncement, only to discover the error of His ways at a later date, or the Lord of the universe is capricious, erratic, and frivolous. Along with the concept of sovereignty and perfection, comes the logical concept of immutability. Perfection does not and cannot change, or it wasn't perfection to begin with. God's desires for us do not change. The nature of sin does not change. The person of Jesus, who paid the price for all sin, does not change. Right and wrong, contrary to popular opinion, do not change. The course of creation through the ages does not change. God's plans for His

people do not change. God's opinions and His concepts of right and wrong do not change. Once again, if God were to change what is right and what is wrong from time to time, then He must have been wrong either then or now. Or perhaps He forgot to consider some critical element in something or another. God, however, cannot be wrong, nor can he fail to consider all the issues and facts.

If this sort of godly mind changing were possible, it would wreak havoc with humankind. We would not know what the rules were. We would not know how to become saved to eternity with God. We would not know what pleases Him, or what displeases Him. He would be a mutable, alterable, paradoxical, and capricious God. One could not count on Him and our salvation would be in great jeopardy. We know, however, that God cannot be like this. He is perfectly consistent; His ways immutable; His Truth perfect. Of course He is going to relate His wishes to us. Of course He is going to set the rules for all time and He is going to relate them to us in a clear and understanding way. He does not desire to confuse or confound, although His word will not be altogether understandable to us because we are not God; we are the created, not the creator, and the creator is always greater than the created.

I also hear the argument that the Bible is impossible to understand and, therefore, it is just an exercise in futility to sit down and try to read it. Well, have you ever tried to understand a letter written to someone else? Messages are written between the lines and words and phrases are used that are meaningful only to the reader. The reader and the writer have a personal relationship. They basically understand what the other is trying to express. They know each other.

This could be part of understanding the problem. If you do not know the Lord at all, and you try to read the very personal letters written to His believers, then much will be misunderstood or missed altogether. But, on the other hand, if you prayerfully and humbly ask God to teach you and show you the meaning, He will do so — in His time and in His way.

There is yet another way of looking at this problem of understanding the Bible. In this modern-day society, we all expect instant everything: instant gratification; instant knowledge; instant understanding. Great scholars have studied the Bible for lifetimes and still do not fully comprehend it all. We must remind ourselves that the writing of this book was inspired by the almighty God of the universe. If we could fully understand it, then we would be as wise as God. We will never understand it completely, but He will continue to give us insight and understanding if we continue to read and study, and if we prayerfully and humbly persist in our quest for Him, and His nature, and His wisdom. We will never be as great as God, therefore, we will never have His understanding of things, but we can grow and learn. This pleases Him.

As to the third possible reason for not wanting to read and study the Bible - you are a believer and accept the Truth of the Bible, but you don't want to deal with its instructions and commandments – you apparently intend to be your own god and go your own way. In

truth, you are rejecting the word of God, and you are choosing your wisdom over His, and your ways over His. Frankly, you enjoy what you're doing and you don't intend to change. If this is your position, at least admit it. But don't you know that to be saved you must submit to God? The path you are on will only drive a wedge between you and your creator, and that wedge will lead to eternal separation from Him. The Lord of Lords will not share His role with you. Either you will be god, or He will. Do you not see that you are making a decision not to follow God? You are posing two abjectly incongruous positions: first, that you believe in God, and second, that you are not going to deal with, or follow His commandments. This is a decision to reject God. Realize it for what it is.

As to the fourth possible reason for not wanting to read and study the Scriptures - you are too lazy, or too busy to read the Holy Scriptures - I believe that these twin scoundrels are very hurtful to Christ, who was, fortunately, not too lazy or busy to die for our sins. Laziness is a debilitating condition of the spirit that serves to waste that one irreplaceable commodity - time. Laziness wastes opportunities to achieve and excel; to contribute to family and society. Laziness wastes - literally throws away - all of the gifts and opportunities God has provided for each of us. Laziness is bad character. It is self-consumed and self-satisfied. It is selfish. It is a sickening waste. It is immature and foolish.

As for being too busy to study the Scripture, I personally know a lot about this malady. For years I was too busy for God, and I still struggle with this problem. After all, I had things to do, a business to run, a family to raise, chores around the house to do, studying to do for my profession, and yes, a book to write. I was busy, too busy for God. I always had time for Him, however, when I was in trouble, or in need, or gripped by fear. People like me treat God like a celestial bellboy: When I want you, I'll call. This has got to be the epitome of arrogance and insensitivity to God. Surely this attitude angers and hurts our Lord, who is never too busy for me or you. Being too busy means that your agenda is more important than God's. Your activities are more important than His plan for your life. Being too busy for God also means that you and I are not very good managers of our time.

Good Tolerance and Bad Tolerance

If truth is immutable, absolute and God defined and dispensed, then how do we work tolerance into the equation of life? Do we disregard the concept of tolerance altogether, holding only to our ways, our concepts and rejecting all who don't agree? Or, on the other hand, do we drink in whatever comes our way, giving all beliefs and philosophies equal authenticity and credibility?

In order to answer these questions, consider the concept of bad tolerance. I believe that tolerance can be destructive to the human spirit (thus, bad tolerance) if one doesn't know the Truth and, therefore, gives equal weight to competing philosophies or religions. In this situation, one shows his ignorance by not knowing the Truth (or he chooses to reject the Truth), and because he doesn't know the Truth, he says that all is true - my way of thinking is true, but so is yours; we are equally true. This type of tolerance is without intellectual merit. How can my beliefs be true and your beliefs as well, when we believe

entirely differently? Either I am right and you are wrong, or you are right and I am wrong, or we are both wrong. Two differing positions can both be wrong, but in no case can they both be True. There can be only one Truth because Truth is absolute and it is unique. Unique means one of a kind, like a finger print — it cannot be duplicated. A thing cannot be sort of unique, or a little unique, or very unique. It is either unique or it is not. Anything other than Truth, however, is not unique and can be duplicated. Accordingly, there can be many positions which are not True, but only one that is True. Therefore, the kind of tolerance that freely ascribes truth to several or all competing religions is born in ignorance, conceived in stupidity and is wholly illogical.

Tolerance, however, that is practiced from a foundation of Truth is kind and generous and full of grace. When you know the Truth, you can then tolerate those who do not. To do so exhibits patience, kindness and wisdom. For example, if your platform for Truth includes the belief that Jesus is God incarnate, and that He paid the price for our sins, and that He rose from the dead, then you can tolerate those who do not agree. You can be polite and graceful and authentic, never looking down your nose at them. This type of tolerance, however, never compromises Truth, or varies from Truth, or tries to add or subtract from Truth. This type of tolerance accepts the man and fully rejects the falsehood he speaks. It shows kindness to the man while standing tall and proud with feet firmly implanted in the concrete of a solid platform of ultimate Truth. This is the tolerance practiced by Jesus.

Remember, the world defines tolerance as not knowing the Truth, or rejecting the Truth, or ascribing the mantle of Truth to all competing positions. This is illogical and without intellectual merit, although widely practiced by intellectuals and sophisticates everywhere. They will not admit to an ultimate Truth because only a transcendent, all powerful God could hand down ultimate Truth. To this group of people, a position which includes God as creator and supreme being is unacceptable. Good tolerance, however, is practiced from a platform of Truth, which accepts the messenger, but rejects the false message. Those who practice bad tolerance stand for nothing because they accept and defend everything. Those who practice good tolerance stand for one definable Truth - they stand for something.

You Must Decide

Okay, men, you have to decide what is Truth and what is not. You must think deeply about this, and then address the core issues of life. You must then draw conclusions and take a stand. Men take a stand. Men do not shy away from the tough issues, or let someone decide for them, or procrastinate, or cower and cringe from deciding who they are and what they stand for. Men gather facts, contemplate, pray, consult, and conclude. Then they take a stand.

Take for example the issue of the equality of all religions. Our society unequivocally stipulates that all religions are to be equally respected (or disrespected, as the case may be) and tolerated. This is required in a society that rejects absolute Truth in favor of every

man defining his own truth. This is also required by a system of law that rejects supreme Truth and the God who dispenses it.

If you stand for Truth, however, and if it erupts from the character of God, then it must follow that all religions are not equally true. Even though they all claim Truth, this cannot be possible. Diametrically opposed positions cannot, at the same time, be True. Either one is True and the others are not, or none is True. You may not hide behind tolerance (bad tolerance), for in so doing, you are either a coward (unmanly), or you have in fact decided that all religions are indeed equal. If the latter is the case, then you should so state and be ready to defend your position, a position which rejects the concept of absolute Truth and transcendent values.

What About Jesus

Take for example the claims of Jesus. He said that He was, in fact, God. Now, some people say that He was a “good man.” By saying that He was a “good man”, one is also saying that He was not God, but He should be seriously considered as a “good man,” who espoused solid values by which to live. Realizing the almost universal conceptual popularity of Jesus’ teachings, people often stop short of declaring Him to be God incarnate, for then they would have to deal with Him. These conceptual types take a more comfortable and safer route: they proclaim loudly His legitimacy and “goodness.” They might even grant Him the rank of prophet.

I used the term “conceptual popularity” because if the popularity were more than conceptual, then the “conceptual Christian” would have to go through a painful metamorphosis to become a “practicing Christian.” To the relativist or the tolerant, this would be an unacceptable alternative.

It seems to me that the above position is wholly untenable. Jesus can’t be a good man under any condition. How can a man be called good if he proclaims to be God, but is not. As the gifted writer, speaker and minister to the young, Josh McDowell, has so aptly put it, Jesus was either a liar, a lunatic or Lord⁸. Jesus either lied about being the son of God and part of the Trinitarian Godhead, or He did not. If He lied, he is certainly not a “good man.” Perhaps He did not lie but was deceived by evil spirits or lunacy. All of us have experienced lunatics raving on the street corners. If Jesus was a lunatic, He certainly could not be considered a “good man.” If, however, Jesus was neither liar nor lunatic, then His claims must be true. He must be Lord. But in no case can He be categorized as a “good man,” not even if He is Lord. Why? Because Jesus would not allow people to refer to Him as good. He made it clear that there was only one who was good, and He was referring to God the Father⁹. Additionally, if Jesus is Lord, one would not simply refer to Him as a “good man.”

8. Josh McDowell, More Than a Carpenter, Living Books, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois (July 1986), p. 25.

9. New Scofield Study Bible, NIV, Matthew 19:17.

Why is Jesus so different? Why can you talk about God to people, but as soon as you mention Jesus, the conversation often stops or becomes stiff and awkward? Why can we talk about any other religious leader in all of history and not have a problem? We can talk about Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed or even David Koresh, and have a perfectly enlightening conversation, but mention the name of Jesus and people will clam-up, choke-up, seize-up, and shut-up. By the way, you will be labeled a “fundamentalist nut” or a “Bible-thumper”. (You know, I’ve never seen anyone thump a Bible. Have you?) Why does this happen? Why does Jesus have this effect on people? I have been in business for over 36 years at this writing and I can attest to this phenomenon. I’ve had it happen to me repeatedly. Why?

The reason is because Jesus said He was God - not almost God, or God-like, or smiled upon by God, or soon-to-be God, but purely and simply God, right now, today. He went further, however: He said that the only way to the Father (that is to heaven) is through Him. There is no other way. We must accept Him as the Son of God and the source of our salvation. We can’t earn our way to heaven; it comes only through faith and grace. He also said that we all are sinners. Now, that’s news we all want to hear. But He went even further: He said that if we believe in Him, He will forgive our sins and that by His death on the cross as atonement for sin, our sins are forgiven and we are saved to eternal life in heaven. Any other solution results in eternity in hell.

This is why the name of Jesus is sharper than a two-edged sword, stings like a bee, and separates family and friends. He requires that we deal with His claims. They are either True or they are not. They cannot be ignored. All the while the relativists and the tolerant are retching at His message. Man loses control. Man loses power. Man is shown to be weak, prideful, and helpless to control his destiny. This is why Jesus is different and why people so often don’t talk about him. They don’t want to deal with His claims. It is easier to ignore Him. But, men, you won’t ignore Him on Judgment Day!

So, what about Jesus? What is the Truth? Where do you stand?

Therefore

1. Relativism seeks to destroy Truth and all moral absolutes, because the existence of Truth or moral absolutes requires a dispenser of Truth who is greater than man, and that dispenser is God. The Relativist rejects God in favor of being in control of his own life. He is haughty and arrogant.
2. Tolerance is bad when you blindly accept any and all philosophies, opinions, and religions that are presented to you. This type of tolerance fears Truth, because the person practicing it would then have to deal with God, and he would have to change what he is doing, and he would have to submit control of his life to God. Satan knew what he was doing when he invented this liberal use of the word 'tolerance.' He knew that it was a society-friendly way out of the quagmire of Christian ethics.
3. Tolerance is good when practiced from a platform of Truth. Good tolerance never compromises Truth, while accepting those who think differently.
4. You can kill your conscience (your smoke detector) by continually assaulting it, and disregarding its warnings. Your conscience is God's voice in you directing your path. If you shut off that voice, you are destroying all direction, communication, and relationship with God.
5. Truth is absolute and unchanging. Truth comes forth from God. Truth does not change from time to time, or from culture to culture, or from person to person. Society cannot define Truth, and man cannot define Truth. Only God defines Truth.
6. The Holy Scriptures are True yesterday, today, and tomorrow. The Bible is the inspired word of God, given by God as a revelation and guide so that we might know Him, and follow His teachings.

Application to Everyday Life

1. Those around you will try to convince you that all is truth, and that you shouldn't judge any thought, action, philosophy, or religious viewpoint. This is because those people do not want to be held responsible for their actions or viewpoints. This is an enormous deception. It is a lie. Don't fall for it!
2. Those who accept everything, stand for nothing. And, they are proud of their "open and accepting" life-philosophy. They think that they are intelligent and moral. Don't believe it!
3. The way to develop a rock-solid base for your life-philosophy is to:
 - a. Give your life to Christ by confessing your sins, and giving up control of your life to Him.
 - b. Pray to Jesus for wisdom.
 - c. Read and study His word. Read and study means to dwell over, contemplate, debate, and think about what you are reading. Take it into your spirit. Take it into your mind. Think!
 - d. Practice the faith. That means follow the teachings of Christ, as revealed in the Bible. Confide in other Christians when you are confused, or fail in living up to the standards that Christ has for you, or when you don't know what to do about a certain issue or problem. Don't be lazy or too busy to seek out God and His Truth. Get rid of your arrogance and self-satisfied attitude. It is sickening to those around you (Yes, they notice. Arrogance is the strangest disease of all; it makes everyone sick but the one who has it.), and it drives a wedge between you and your Creator. Imagine how foolish a haughty and arrogant person must look to the Lord. It must be somewhat similar to the way a child looks to a senior citizen, when the child professes to be the harbinger of all knowledge.

part four

MEN & THE FAMILY STRUCTURE

MEN AND THE FAMILY STRUCTURE

“The clarity of gender makes possible the human dialectic. Let the lines of balanced tension go slack and the structure dissolves into the ooze of androgyny and narcissism.” Lewis Lapham, Imperial Masquerade (1990)

Who am I? This is a question all too often asked by men – particularly young men – in today’s society. Associated questions are: What am I supposed to do? How am I supposed to act? What opinions are propitious for me to espouse? How should I dress? What car should I drive? And so on...

A significant portion of the male population today has lost a sense of maleness, and has very little pride in being a man. Men are tentative and unsure of their role--their job, if you will. Every time they display male traits it seems to result in antipathy by the women in their lives. For definition, the young men of today — and some of the older ones, too — look to women. Men today sort of try this and then that until they conjure up a cacophony of personality traits and mores that seems to be somewhat acceptable to the women of their lives. Men today are belittled for being male-like. They are put down and their presence in society reduced to that of a macho sire for the propagation of the species. In T.V. commercials, which are extremely revealing with regard to society’s current dicta, men are reduced to overgrown children, often whinny with high-pitched voices, and looking to their wives for wisdom and direction, along with the younger children. Even the children of T.V. commercials are depicted as having more street smarts and savvy than their dads.

Too often in our modern day society, dads are providing less and less of an example for young boys to follow, and if an example is offered, it is amorphous and inappropriate. I remember dads teaching boys not to cry at the drop of a hat and to have other masculine ways, while today’s society nullifies dad’s teaching with that of its own: that readily crying and having feminine characteristics is not only acceptable, but to be encouraged. I remember dads teaching boys to defend themselves and their families, if necessary, while today’s society nullifies dad’s teaching with that of its own: that fighting is never justified and should be avoided at all cost, even to the point of surrender. I remember dads teaching boys about the demands of work and the responsibility of providing for one’s family, while today’s society nullifies dad’s teaching with that of its own: that the responsibility of provision is just as much mom’s as it is dad’s, and that one should not allow work to interfere with one’s personal life. I remember dads teaching boys about the importance of providing leadership for the family, while today’s society nullifies dad’s teaching with that of its own: that mom is just as much a leader in the family as dad, and that dad has no right to impose his vision for the family on her or the children. And I don’t see dads teaching their children about God. Religious training is left to the women, if it is addressed at all.

The limited examples provided above are certainly not intended to be an exhaustive list, but rather provide just a glimpse into the five major categories of a man's mission: 1) teaching boys how to be, and act like men (yes, men act differently than women); 2) teaching boys to defend themselves and their families from all manner of harm; 3) teaching boys about the importance and joy of providing for their families; 4) teaching boys to provide leadership and love for their families; and 5) the most important job of all: teaching children about God and being the high priest of the family.

Men today are confused. They are confused about their role in society. They are confused about their role in the family. They are confused about what's expected of them. They are confused about their interactions with women. They are confused and they have been sold a bill of goods, which redefines their mission and their role. This confusion and lack of role definition are relatively new phenomenon in our society; starting, I believe, in the 1960s and continuing on today. The 1960s brought a mentality of 'if it feels good, do it' to our society. It was also the age of drugs, rebellion, a lack of respect for authority, and unquestionably a white-hot distrust for the establishment, which was exacerbated by the Viet Nam conflict.

The Retooling of the American Male

This fundamental change in our society continued with the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Brought about in part by the sometimes-unfair treatment and second-class citizen status of women, the movement lost its balance and marched ahead with profligate abandon to belittle men, burn bras, systematically destroy the age-old tradition of chivalry, and fashion a profound distrust and animosity between the genders. The goal seems to be to create a new race of hermaphrodites. Uni-sex is in; male and female is out.

"There is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous."
Napoleon 1, after the retreat from Russia, December 1812.

Take for example the absurd episode that took place in Lexington, North Carolina in 1996. A truly heinous crime was committed on the playground of a local elementary school. It appears that a blond-haired, bespectacled, six year old boy, Jonathan Prevette, kissed a little girl on the cheek (the boy reported that she asked him to kiss her). Looking on was a teacher, who, noting this abhorrent behavior, quickly reported it to the principal. The boy subsequently had charges brought against him — by a legal system obviously devoid of common sense and apparently with nothing better to do — for sexual harassment and was suspended from school. The story was reported widely by all the media. I am amazed at the lack of common sense and the blatant ineptitude of the school officials involved in this episode. Here is an example of throwing out all maturity, judgment, wisdom, and common sense in favor of a misapplied rule of law and a radical feminist view of political correctness.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ruth Marcus, "Harassment Damage Approved; High Court Expands Protection Against Sex Bias in Schools," Washington Post, February 27, 1992, p. A1.

What did this little boy actually do? What was his real crime? It was this: he breached the radical feminist tenant of the 'Retooling of the American Male' (my term). Let me explain. It seems that there is a certain segment of our culture that desires to remake (retool) the genetic predispositions, thinking processes, mannerisms, and all other defining distinctives of men. Where is the best place to begin this process? At a very young age, while still boys.

Columnist Linda Chavez believes that elementary schools have become sort of a first stop in a manufacturing process to reorder the way children, especially boys, think and act. She wrote, "Jonathan Prevette may be off the hook temporarily, but not for long. If the feds and their feminist allies have their way, every little boy and girl in the nation will be taught that flirting is a crime, and even an admiring look, much less a kiss, can land you in court."¹¹

Another columnist, John Leo, wrote, "My favorite [example] is...the third-grade boy accused of touching a girl on the breasts, though it is perhaps fairer to say that during a game of tag, he tagged her on the very spot where her breasts would presumably appear in three or four years. This is like being accused of robbing a bank that hasn't been built yet."¹²

I am reminded of the cartoon I saw somewhere that depicts a little boy talking to a little girl after school. The girl is loaded with schoolbooks. The little boy has his lawyer with him at all times and after a short consultation informs the little girl that, on advice of counsel, he will **not** be able to carry her books home for her. To the radical feminists, overt displays of chivalry and good manners are condescending.

After the U. S. Supreme Court ruled in 1992 that schools could be held liable for sexual harassment that occurred within schools, and even though that particular case was concerned with a girl who was harassed by a teacher,¹³ government bureaucrats, lead by the Department of Education, jumped in to design and fund programs to teach boys not to think like boys.¹⁴ The National Organization for Women (NOW) and the American Association of University Women (AAUW) threw their considerable weight behind these programs. Their definition of harassment, however, included sexual looks, rumors, and body language — behavior that would be considered normal by many.¹⁵ "In other words, said Dr. James Dobson, "any evidence of sexual awareness between boys and girls was registered as evidence of abuse and insult. What happened to little Jonathan in Lexington,

¹¹ Linda Chavez, "Feminist Kiss Patrol Is on the March," USA Today, October 2, 1996, p. 15A.

¹² John Leo, "Expel Georgie Porgie Now!", U.S. News and World Report, October 7, 1996, p. 37.

¹³ Ruth Marcus, "Harassment Damage Approved..."

¹⁴ Dobson, James C., Ph.D., Family News From Dr. James Dobson, Focus On The Family, January 1997, p. 1, Concepts and general wording of paragraph taken largely from cited publication.

¹⁵ John Leo, "Expel Georgie Porgie Now!"

therefore, is merely a product of left wing ideology run amok in some of the nation's schools."¹⁶

Dr. James Dobson, who founded and continues to head Focus on the Family, a fabulous Christian ministry that, as the name indicates, focuses on family issues, sees two possible reasons for this apparent retooling of the American male. He states, "First, feminists hope that by indoctrinating and modifying boys' behavior during their teachable years, they can mold and shape the men those lads will become. That accounts for the effort to 'straighten them out' while they are young. The problem with that strategy is that little boys are being treated as members of a flawed sex that is desperately in need of 'fixing.'"¹⁷ Dobson's view seems to be seconded by David Blankenhorn, author of "Fatherless America," who said, "Can you imagine what would happen if women were labeled basically destructive? It would be seen as hostile, mean-spirited, outside the boundaries of civil discourse."¹⁸

A family therapist named Michael Gurian adds to the discussion in his book "The Wonder of Boys." He postulates that boys are being rebuffed and rebuked for being what they are "hard wired" to be. Boys are, by God's design, impacted by the hormone testosterone, which affects the male brain to make boys and men aggressive, competitive, performance-oriented, problem-solvers, and risk takers.¹⁹

The second reason Dr. Dobson sees for the retooling of boys is government funding and policy. In his view, the way to get government funding for a favorite program or cause is to identify a category of victims and then design a program to, as Dobson says, "Give 'em a hand." He postulates that the radical feminists have identified girls as the victims. Boys, of course, are the offenders, and left-wing activists are the rescuers. This leaves government as the benefactor. There is obviously some truth to his observations in that Congress appropriated millions of dollars under the Gender Equity Act. We now have various "gender-equity training programs" in the public schools.²⁰ Dr. Dobson further observes that many jobs have been created in order to promote the leftist agenda in public schools. All it takes is the identification of a vast group of victims.

It seems that a certain segment of women have successfully identified themselves as victims, and as a consequence of their status as victims, have demanded and received yet another weighty status, that of a "minority group." It is curious that they claim minority status when females constitute 51.2% of the American population.²¹ This successful entry

¹⁶ Dobson, James C., Ph.D., p. 2.

¹⁷ Dobson, James C., Ph.D., p. 2.

¹⁸ Karen Peterson, "Have They Been Trampled in Rush to Bolster Girls?" USA Today, November 14, 1996, p. 1D.

¹⁹ Michael Gurian, "The Wonder of Boys", New York: Tarcher and Putnam, 1996.

²⁰ "Take Your Daughter to Congress Day," National Review, May 15, 1995.

²¹ U. S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1995, Washington D.C., 1995, p.14.

into “victim status” has been emulated by various other groups, who claim minority status due to the American cultural system (white males being the worst victimizers of all). Dobson adds to this observation by saying, “Now homosexuals...drug addicts, alcoholics, transsexuals and many other groups *identified by their behavior* have been granted special rights and benefits in specific regions of the nation. Any effort to curtail that special status is met with outrage.”²²

You might remember the recent vote in Colorado that effectively banned special rights for homosexuals — not basic human rights that all have a right to enjoy, but ‘special rights.’ The people of Colorado considered the issues and voted to ban special rights for homosexuals. I seem to remember something in civics class about this being a government of and by and for the people. I also remember something about majority rule in a democratic society. And finally, I certainly remember a great deal about the role of the judiciary, which is to interpret the law, not *make the law*. Regardless of all my recollections, the case was taken to the U. S. Supreme Court, where it was shot down like a pheasant on the first day of hunting season. The High Court’s decision effectively opened the flood gates for special rights for homosexuals, or any other group identified by their behavior, as opposed to race, color, gender, or religious affiliation; assuming the attainment of victim and minority status, of course. Chuck Colson wrote, “...the court effectively branded as a bigot any citizen who considers homosexuality immoral.”²³

I do not want any person to be treated unfairly or discriminated against or treated in a mean-spirited manner because of race, color, gender, or religious affiliation. This is abhorrent to a God who hates an “unfair measure”.²⁴ It is abhorrent to hold people down or beat them down or even talk down to them. But I do believe that we all have the obligation to be discriminating with regard to the behavior of those around us. Some behavior is simply not acceptable, and that is not being a bigot or prejudice. That is Satan’s lie to get you to accept his ways along side God’s ways. Anyone with any degree of common sense realizes that certain behaviors are not acceptable and that each of us has a right to decide that on his own. And the fact is that each of us freely makes use of that right and obligation.

I want to further state that I do not put the blame on women, specifically the radical feminists, for the woes of our society, as you will see upon reading further. Nor do I put all women into the category of ‘radical feminist,’ whom I realize represent only a small fraction of the female population. I respect, admire, and fully enjoy my friendships and associations with women in general. I do not share these feelings, however, with the radical feminist, who I believe are dividing the genders, causing confusion and distrust to abound.

²² Dobson, James C., Ph.D., p. 3.

²³ Chuck Colson, “Kingdoms in Conflict,” *First Things*, November 1996, p.34.

²⁴ Proverbs 20:10,23; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

As a result of all these changes, our society has all but lost its fabric; its skeletal shape is deformed and its purpose and mission have been lost somewhere in the muck and quagmire of modern-day thinking. Half of all marriages end in a renting divorce. This is fully triple the number of marriages dissolved by the courts in 1960.²⁵ In my own state of Texas, 55% of marriages end in divorce.²⁶ In my view, women have never been treated with less respect and admiration. Manners and civility have been proclaimed old-fashioned, unnecessary, and a relic of the past, not to speak of condescending. Consider the following quote: *“The chivalrous man who holds a door open or signals a woman to go ahead of him when he’s driving is negotiating both status and connection.”*²⁷ A growing number of women today actually resent being treated politely by a man. They feel it is demeaning.

The fruits of our modern thinking and new age thought can further be seen in pernicious pornography, exploitation of children, more than one million babies killed each year as a result of abortion on demand (the ultimate method of birth control), rising crime, and the disintegration of the American family. Adding to the attack on an ordered society and the nuclear family unit is the ever-increasing acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex marriages. Major companies are now offering full marital benefits to same-sex partners of employees. State governments, as well as the Federal Government, are being pressured relentlessly to grant full spousal benefits to same-sex partners. Next we will have heterosexual live-in couples crying foul because they are not getting spousal benefits. They might have a point! Seems you have to practice deviant behavior to be eligible for governmental benefits.

The Root Cause

Why is all this happening? What is causing this disintegration of our society? Who’s to blame? Put simply, we are not following God’s plan for family and society. Whenever mankind travels his own road and ignores God’s plan, disaster occurs. God has a plan and structure for the family. After all, He created man and woman and He instigated and designed the first marriage, between Adam and Eve. Let’s look at God’s plan by referring directly to His word.

God’s Plan for Families

As we begin this discussion, let me say that I am well aware that many will recoil, and reject outright these concepts. God’s plan is most certainly out of sync with modern-day society. Women often look upon God’s plan as ridiculous and outdated, reflecting the customs of a social order dating back some two millennia. Some women will find God’s plan, as it appears in Holy Scripture, to be insulting and degrading to women. Some will

²⁵ Source: Los Angeles Times, 5/27/96, page A16.

²⁶ 1995 Texas Department of Health Bureau of Vital Statistics Annual Report.

²⁷ Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don’t Understand*, (1990).

feel that if this is the Christian injunction for women, then “I want nothing to do with Christianity.” Others will continue to feign Christianity, except for certain ordinances which one disagrees with, and which cause considerable discomfort.

It really all boils down to whether a person considers the Bible to be the inerrant, indisputable word of God (see section called “The Interview”), appropriate and relevant for all time and for all of God’s creation. Or, on the other hand, one might determine that the Bible is as old and out-dated, as is the message it espouses. Or, that the Bible was inspired by God perhaps, but written by men, who were prone to error, just as all people are so prone.

I have addressed these issues in the section called “The Interview.” For purposes of this discussion, I will summarize my beliefs with the following statements:

1. I believe that the Bible is the inerrant, indisputable word of God, appropriate and relevant for all time and for all of God’s creation.
2. I believe that God communicated all that was necessary in His word and that He would not allow the wide dissemination of His word over thousands of years if it contained contradictions or inaccuracies, with respect to the fundamentals of the faith. We would then be operating from an imperfect owner’s manual. What sense does that make?
3. I believe that God wants to lead us to Him, not confuse us and drive us away.
4. I believe that if one doesn’t hold to the inerrancy of the Bible, then it is intellectually necessary to assume that it contains errors. It is, therefore, necessary to allow each person on Earth, at least those so inclined, to concoct his or her own truth (see section on “Truth”) and interpretation. Each person will have the right to decide what portions of the Bible are true, accurate, and applicable to the day, and which are not. Of course, only those passages with which one agrees will make the cut, and, of course, my list is more appropriate than yours. Right?
5. I believe that if you put the major doctrines of Christianity up for a vote, you are left with nothing to believe in. That’s called Humanism.
6. I believe that if there is such a being as God, and such a thing as faith, and such a phenomenon as God’s word, then only God can define His word; not man, not woman.
7. I believe that if the Bible is not as I have stated, then there are no accurate and dependable instructions from the Lord of this universe. He has left us in a lurch, if you will, with no direction and no instruction as to how to approach Him. Salvation, therefore, is apparently for Him to know and for us to discover.

Well, this is where I stand. Where do you stand? The doctrines I am about to present are taken directly — word for word — from the Bible. This will be the first time

some of you have ever seen these passages, unpopular as they are, and perhaps this will be the first time you have ever actually considered what God's plan for families actually is. After reading this section, you will have a decision to make. Will you order your life by God's design, or by your own design? Christianity is a difficult religion, and one that requires much of its followers. There is a price to pay, and it is obedience to God's plan. And the only way we know His plan is by reading and meditating on His word. If you are not obedient to God, then you either don't really believe in Him, or you actually place your intellect and wisdom above His. You, then, become god (little 'g'), for by definition, there can only be one God. It is either He, or it is you.

To begin this discussion, let's determine who originally established the marital relationship. It was God! We learn from the second chapter of the Book of Genesis that Adam, the first human being created by God, was alone among the animal and plant creations of God. He was lonely and desired companionship and a helpmate...

God's Plan: Scripture #1:

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.²⁸

God, Himself, created the institution of marriage between a man and a woman. His ideal is that the marriage relationship would endure for a lifetime, surviving trials and tribulations until death they do part. As to the term "suitable helper" in the above passage, only another God-created human being, shaped in the image of God, would be "suitable" for Adam. After the 'he', God created a most suitable 'she', the perfect complement and completion of the basic family unit.

Concerning the word "helper," today's modern woman often looks upon that term as degrading, as if she is less than a man; as if she is not as worthy as a man, in that she is only his helper. After all, is an apprentice as significant as the master craftsman? The Hebrew word for helper is "ezer," meaning "a help," or "a support," or an "assistant." This term, however, takes on an astounding significance when one considers other places in the Bible where this word is used. The root of this word is used repeatedly in the Bible to refer to God as 'helper' of a nation or of individuals. God is man's helper in all kinds of distress:

²⁸ Genesis 2:21-25; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

*My father's God was my 'helper'; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh.²⁹ ...Hear, O Lord, the cry of Judah...Oh be his 'help' against his foes! There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides on the heavens to 'help' you...Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord? He is your shield and 'helper.'*³⁰

May he (God) send you 'help' from the sanctuary...³¹

We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our 'help' and our shield.³²

...You are my 'help' and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay.³³

O house of Israel, trust in the Lord, he is their 'help' and shield. O House of Aaron, trust in the Lord, he is their 'help' and shield. You, who fear him, trust in the Lord, he is their 'help' and shield.³⁴

I lift up my eyes to the hills — where does my 'help' come from? My 'help' comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.³⁵

Our 'help' is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.³⁶

Blessed is he whose 'help' is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God...³⁷

You are destroyed, O Israel, because you are against me, against your 'helper.'³⁸

²⁹ Exodus 18:14; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

³⁰ Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

³¹ Psalms 20:2; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

³² Psalms 33:20; The Holy Bible, New International Version.

³³ Psalms 70:5; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

³⁴ Psalms 115:9, 10, 11; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

³⁵ Psalms 121:1-2; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

³⁶ Psalms 124:8; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

³⁷ Psalms 146:5; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

In all of the above Scriptures, the same root word for helper is used, and God is the one doing the helping. Now, surely we would not argue that God is inferior to those He helps. Add to this line of thought the mission of The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit, about whom we Christians seem to know so little, is referred to as the Counselor³⁹. In other reverences, He is referred to as a teacher.⁴⁰ The Holy Spirit is clearly a helper to God's creation. Counselors and teachers are certainly helpers. Now, are we to argue that the Holy Spirit is inferior to the human race He was sent to help? Jesus was also a helper. He helped people from the first day of His ministry to the present day. He taught; He healed; He forgave sins and restored self-images; He corrected, He pointed all of mankind toward the straight path to salvation; He even died on the cross for our sins. Yes, I would say that He was a helper.

You see, the concept of helper as defined by God is a high calling, not a position of servitude or inferiority or obsequiousness. God is by nature a helper and it is my heart-opinion (an opinion I hold to deeply, although I have no Scriptural foundation for it) that when He created woman, He placed in her the ability to have this very sweet part of God's nature — the helper, the care giver, the servant — and He then charged her with continuing the task that He, Himself, has always assumed. Being a helper is in no way a lowly rank, or a statement as to one's worth or relative value. It is a mission, a charge given by God to women, just as He gives other charges to men. To refuse His mission, is to refuse to obey Him, and a refusal to obey, is a rejection of His Lordship.

Refer now to the latter part of Scripture No. 1: *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.*⁴¹ It was God's plan that the husband and wife would somehow, mysteriously become one flesh. Just imagine, the relationship would be so close, so harmonious, so dependent on one another, that they would become one flesh. (More on this later.)

As a businessman, I can't help but to think of two different companies merging. They have two characters (souls), two balance sheets, two sets of management, and two sets of employees, but somehow they come together to form one company — they merge and go forward for the common good. Sometime mergers fail, but it's not because of an uncomplimentary product base, or a lack of planning, or regulatory prohibitions, or a lack of funds, or the incompatibility of their respective asset bases. The main reason mergers sometimes fail is because the cultures of the two companies are widely disparate. In other words, what matters to one doesn't matter at all to the other. Goals and aspirations differ greatly as does character and moral fiber. One company might be extremely employee oriented, while the other is not. And at the core of an unsuccessful merger is ego. The acquired management team refuses to submit its will to the acquiring management team.

³⁸ Hosea 13:9; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

³⁹ John 14:26; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

⁴⁰ Luke 12:12, John 14:26; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

⁴¹ Genesis 2:24; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

Power plays ensue and there is no harmony, no oneness of purpose, and direction; no thought of what is best for the company or the other guy. The focus is 'me,' and my career, and my influence, and my reputation, and my power base. Wise boards of directors study the culture of a merger candidate like a mother studies a newborn baby. When the cultures are harmonious, the two companies come together as one and go forward more competitively and successfully than either could have possibly done alone.

This is similar to what takes place in marriage. If the cultures are in harmony between a man and a woman, as God intends them to be, they come together in spirit and body, and they become one flesh in the eyes of God — the two are one, a marital unit, a family. This is a wondrous mystery fully understood by God alone. But the point is that God created marriage as one of his first recorded acts. He created a helper for man, a companion, the other side of the equation, the reaction to the action, the breathing out after breathing in, the perfect complement, and a partner for life.

Now, having created the institution of marriage, the Lord God has every right to set the rules by which it can flourish. God always sets the rules for anything he creates. Marriage was intended by God to be a persistent institution, enduring all of life's trials, both within the marital relationship and those imposed from the outside world. Marriage was designed by God to be a perfect union (this does not mean that the marriage is perfect, or that the husband or wife are perfect; it means that the 'union' created by God is perfect), both physically and spiritually, between one man and one woman. How do I know this? Read the Scripture. Marriage is also the basic unit into which children are born. God intended for children to have a mother and a father, each filling an important role in the child's development. Now let's consider yet another Scripture...

God's Plan: Scripture #2:

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself....For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother — which is the first commandment with a promise — that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on earth.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children, instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.⁴²

In reading this passage, we are immediately presented with one of the most controversial passages in the Bible: *Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*⁴³

The word 'submit' has been defined and redefined, apparently the most misunderstood word in the English language. This is one of those uncomfortable passages that a large number of professing Christians, mostly women, simply will not accept at face value. As a Sunday School teacher of adults for several years in an evangelical church, I was astounded at the response from the women in the class when these passages were taught. The most commonly recurring comment I heard was that the word 'submit' did not really mean submit, as we understand the word today. It meant something else — undefined of course. It never ceased to amaze me that otherwise intelligent people could claim to be Christians and to believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, while at the same time selecting certain biblical passages with which they passionately disagree, and then proceeding to disclaim the wording, the language, and the meaning, assigning instead their own mutated, amorphous definition.

Another common argument was along the lines that the submission of women to their husbands was clearly a cultural practice of the times, but one that is wholly inappropriate for today. Furthermore, they would argue, to submit to anyone is demeaning and straight out of the ignorance of the outdated customs of past ages. In my experience, I can think of no other biblical passage that engenders so much anger and frustration among women, not to speak of a thorough misunderstanding among men, who too often acquiesce to the strident and vociferous opinions of their women.

If each of us is the final judge as to which biblical passages are appropriate and canonical (according to church decree, or law; included in the canon of Scripture), then it must follow that we place our judgments above the God in whom we claim to believe. Each of us, then, is a god (little 'g'). I can conceive of no more offensive example of hubris and illogical rationalization. Don't you see, this is another twist in the age-old problem of mankind: he wants to be like God, and sometimes thinks he is God, or at least he exhibits judgments that are more appropriate to the modern-day condition (or so he thinks).

⁴² Ephesians 5:22 - 6:4; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

⁴³ Ephesians 5:22-24; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

Well, let's look at the facts. The Greek word used in the ancient Scriptures, and translated into English as submit, is *hypotasso or hypotage*. The meaning of these words clearly and specifically translates into subjection, implying that one subjects himself, or submits himself, or subordinates himself, to another. In the Greek, these words imply responsive obedience to whomever one is subject to. These words occur only three times in the Gospels, but forty-one times in the Epistles.

The word 'submit,' clearly means submit; however, the biblical concept of submission goes considerably deeper. There are, of course, two types of submission: voluntary and involuntary. The biblical concept of the submission of wives to their husbands involves only voluntary submission. Involuntary submission of wives to husbands would most definitely be cultural in nature, given only to a time and place in history and defined by local custom. But voluntary submission is totally another matter. It is an act of the woman's will, in obedience to God's directives and His plan for families.

The concept of voluntary submission is no stranger to the Bible. I found twenty-seven specific passages that dealt with submission, only five of which were directed toward women. Here are some examples:

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.⁴⁴

...who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand — with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.⁴⁵

Submit to God and be at peace with him; in this way prosperity will come to you.⁴⁶

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name."⁴⁷

...the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Hebrews 5:7; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

⁴⁵ 1 Peter 3:22; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

⁴⁶ Job 22:21; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

⁴⁷ Luke 10:17; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

⁴⁸ Romans 8:7; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

*Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.*⁴⁹

*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*⁵⁰

Look back over these seven passages. The first and second passages deal with the submission of Jesus to the will of the Father. The God of the universe, the second part of the Godhead, the Son of God, Himself, submitted to God the Father. This is a remarkable example of voluntary submission. Now, isn't it provocative to contemplate how Jesus voluntarily submitted to the will of the Father, while it is unthinkable for wives to submit to their husbands in obedience to God's word? It's okay for Jesus, but not for me! It's demeaning!

This third passage is likewise an example of voluntary submission. Its message is simple — submit to God...

The fourth passage is a compelling example of involuntary submission. The demons had no choice but to submit to the messengers of Christ.

The fifth passage is provocative in that it states that the sinful mind is hostile to God and cannot submit to Him. This speaks to the state of mind of one who cannot submit to the will of God. Remember, the only way we clearly know the will of God is through His written word. That's why He gave us the Bible, so that we could ascertain His will, and His nature, and His plan for us, His human creation. Otherwise we would have six billion differing interpretations of God's will, one for each person on Earth.

The sixth passage, in my view, is also an example of involuntary submission. It is required that we submit to the authorities and to the laws of the land. We have no viable choice; we are required to follow the law, or off to jail we go.

The last passage speaks to submitting to one another in reverence to Christ. To me this is a powerful example of voluntary submission. We are to submit to one another; that is, put the other person first; submit your will to his needs out of respect for the fact that Christ asked you to do so, and in fact set the example by dying on the cross for our eternal salvation.

In the above passages, as well as many others throughout the Bible, we are presented with example after example of submission. We are to submit to authorities; we are to submit to God; we are to submit to one another; husbands are certainly expected to submit to God; children are to submit to their parents. All of these strictures seem to be

⁴⁹ Romans 13:5; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

⁵⁰ Ephesians 5:21; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

acceptable, but add to them the submission of wives to their husbands and the sparks start flying. All of the sudden submit doesn't really mean submit, it means something else.

In my years of teaching Sunday School, however, it is interesting to note that the women who exhibit the greatest antipathy toward these Scriptures have never suggested that we men should not submit to God, or that their husbands shouldn't submit to God, or that children should not submit to their parents, or that men and women should not submit to the proper authorities. It's just that those specific passages about wives and husbands should in some way be attenuated, or even redefined to a more modern and comfortable conclusion. Here again, we have the rebellion of mankind to God's word — at least the parts of His word with which we disagree. Here again we have an approach to the Holy Scriptures that is wholly illogical: *I accept that part of Scripture I agree with and can live with, and I reject as anachronistic those parts with which I disagree. After all, I am an intelligent and thinking individual, living in an enlightened, modern-day society.* To this line of thinking we must add that the Bible is not inerrant and not necessarily appropriate for instruction in this current age. (If you're going to hold to this line of thinking, then at least take it to its logical conclusion. Otherwise, you are being intellectually dishonest.)

One additional point needs to be made. It makes no sense at all to claim submission to God, and then refuse to obey His commandments. The only way we have of knowing what God thinks, and what He wants, and what His intentions are, is by means of prayer, followed by a careful, intelligent, life-long study of His inspired written word. He has chosen to communicate with His creation in this manner. In so doing, He has provided a reference manual for our use, a constant comfort for times of trouble, and a means of feeling close to Him. The Holy Scriptures are just as immutable as God, Himself. If the Scriptures were correct and appropriate at one time, but are no longer so, then God's rules, laws, and requirements for mankind must likewise change from time to time. If this is so, then God is not perfection, nor is His wisdom, for perfect laws never need changing. An immutable God does not come up with laws and commandments which need changing and updating now and then, nor does the creator of the universe change His mind, for to do so implies a mistaken first position.

It is important to think through these issues. Logical thinking requires an "if this, then that" approach. Is God immutable, omnipresent, and omnipotent or not? If He is, then it's up to Him to set the parameters of behavior and worship. If He is not, then it's up to each of us to decide truth on our own. That being the case, Christianity is no more than an outgrowth of human thought, one more road to existentialism, one more world religion, born not of an omnipotent God, but rather formed by various convenient molds to fit the whims of differing eras and societies.

Submission is crucial to our Christian development; perhaps even the quintessential element. If we cannot submit one to the other, and wives to husbands, as instructed by God's word, then we will not be able to submit to God, as He also instructs us to do in His word. If one cannot submit to God, then he or she is lost, for He requires submission. Submission is the means by which we acknowledge the Lordship of Christ; it is the manifestation of a humble realization of the person of Christ; it is the proof positive of our

belief in Him. Belief is an action verb, not an intellectual or theoretical exercise. You believe a chair will hold you, so you sit in it without first testing its sturdiness. You believe the parachute will open, so you jump out of the plane. You believe the surgeon can heal you, so you submit to an operation. This last example clearly depicts the close relationship between belief and submission. First you believe, and then you submit. If you didn't believe in the claims of the surgeon, you would not submit to his care. So it is with Jesus. If you believe in Him, you will submit to Him. If not, you won't!

Yes, wives are to submit to their husbands according to God's word:

*Wives, submit to you husbands as to the Lord.*⁵¹

*Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*⁵²

*Wives, submit to you husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.*⁵³

*Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.*⁵⁴

Notice that the above Scriptures relate the act of submission to something else. In the first verse, wives are to submit "as to the Lord." To me this means that wives are to submit to their husbands just as they submit to the Lord. This passage clearly ties submission to one's husband to one's submission to the Lord. If a wife doesn't submit to her husband, then she certainly cannot claim submission to God.

In the second verse, submission to husbands is tied to the submission of the church to Christ. The church, which is to say, all professing Christians, voluntarily submits to the leadership of Christ. Submission to Christ, as we have discussed, is the cornerstone of the Christian walk. If we do not submit to Christ, then we do not acknowledge His Lordship over our lives. As a result, he is not in control; we are in control.

In that we are living on Earth and not in Heaven with Christ, where we would be able to have face-to-face conversations, the only way we are able to know what God has instructed us to do is by prayer, followed by reading and comprehending His written word. Instead of issuing instructions face to face, He has done so in writing. In the military, written instructions are considered to be weightier than verbal ones. Women, therefore, must

⁵¹ Ephesians 5:22; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

⁵² Ephesians 5:24; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

⁵³ Colossians 3:18; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

⁵⁴ 1 Peter 3:1-2; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ. How does the church submit? The church submits to Christ by reading the Holy Scriptures in order to discover God's plan and instructions, and then obeying those strictures. Wives are to do the same.

The third passage admonishes wives to submit to their husbands "as is fitting in the Lord." My impression of this passage is that Christian women are expected to represent the faith and the Lord with dignity, grace, and obedience. It is very important for the unsaved to look upon Christians with respect and wonder.

The last passage presages a totally new purpose for submission. In this passage, God clearly intends women to set an example to unbelieving husbands, and through this example, souls can be won for the Lord. I sense that yet a deeper message might be intended here. Practice what you preach. Talk the talk, but make sure you walk the walk. Through this passage we can also learn that God intends men and women to follow His laws regardless of the worthiness of one's spouse. You see, nowhere in Scripture does it say to do this or do that if your spouse is worthy and doing his or her part. God is funny that way. He tells us what to do and He expects us to do it. He really doesn't need our puny judgments or second-guessing along the way.

In all of these examples, voluntary submission is requested. Women are to do what God asks them to do: voluntarily submit. Why? Because God has requested it and designed it into the family structure. Women have been given a difficult job, but they are perfectly equipped for the task. As I mentioned previously, it is my heart-opinion that God has taken some of the sweetest and most precious and caring ingredients of His spiritual character and placed them in the hearts of women. This is why women make a home, while the men build it and protect it. God has asked them to take this part of His character and use it, as He instructs, to preserve the family, nurture the children, and accomplish His perfect will for His people. This is the role of wives. In no way is the imparting of a specific role by God a demeaning experience. In no way does any mature Christian man believe that his wife is less than himself in intelligence or abilities or importance to the family or in the eyes of God. It is simply that wives have one role (God-ordained job), while men have another (we'll get to that later).

Role reversal, which is rampant in our society, is a sickening sight to behold, and is immediately recognizable. Men take on the attributes of women, and women take on the attributes of men. It reminds me of a play in which big, hairy men dress like women, and petite women dress like men. The men try to act like, sound like and move like women. Likewise, the women dress like men and try to act 'male.' Of course, both groups fail miserably in their attempts at genetic reconstruction, usually to the joy of the audience. This condition never works long-term in a family because we are not tooled for this unnatural behavior. Furthermore, it takes a great deal of energy to sustain an unnatural role day after day.

After ruminating long and hard on this condition, I have come to believe that the cause can be traced to a vacuum of leadership brought about by confused males wondering around looking for a position pleasing to everyone and objectionable to no one.

Well, we all know what happens to vacuums. They get filled. This time by the women who jump in to provide the much needed leadership. Vacuums of leadership will always get filled, whether in a family, a committee, a club, a business, a church, or a government.

Over the years, I have observed that resentment is the natural result of role reversal in a family. The husband resents, although he may not openly admit it, his wife thundering in and snatching away his role, manhood, and self-esteem, like an owl pouncing on a field mouse and carrying it away to a high place, out of reach and hopelessly lost. The wife resents having to take over and make all the decisions and tough calls. She feels that all the responsibility is hers for the hard decisions and the well being of the family. She resents this, although she may not admit it, and she loses respect for her husband, who is still wandering around looking for someone to please. The thought of submission is truly repugnant to her. "If I submit to this man's judgment," whispers this wife, in the recesses of her heart, "we will all be in big trouble. I know how his mind works and how his judgment is faulty. I love him, but he just can't make the tough decisions."

Consider this, wives: if God were to appear before you, and clearly instruct you to submit to your husbands, would you do it? Well, that is exactly what He has done, only He put His instructions in writing, just so there is no misunderstanding. Submission to one's husband is, at its heart, submission to Christ. If a woman refuses to submit to her husband, she is, in reality, refusing to submit to Christ, for it was He who commanded the submission of wives to husbands. The issue of obedience is always the hard part. Right?

An Example: The issue of submission is almost always misunderstood by the immature, and it is often misunderstood by mature, professing Christians. People often assume that the manifestation of submission for a wife is found in an overbearing husband issuing harsh orders — do this, do that — or in not respecting and listening to his wife, or in belittling his wife — particularly in front of the children — or in not paying attention to her needs, opinions, wishes and goals. It is further assumed by some women that the manifestation of submission will include giving up everything that is important to her, even her identity as an individual, in favor of providing everything for her husband. She fears that her feelings won't be respected or recognized.

It is almost impossible to describe how submission is manifested. This is because it is manifested differently between each man and woman. God works out his plan for the family in many different ways, to meet the needs of each individual marriage. Well, there are no perfect marriages, but there is one couple I have known for many years that might provide some insight to the submission of a wife to her husband. This particular wife has a remarkable ability to submit to her husband, while maintaining her identity, self-respect, focus, and dignity. Although I've watched this family for many years, I remain astonished at her adroitness and sagacity as she plays out her role as mother and wife. She always offers her opinions, and not in an anemic manner. She has opinions on most everything and does not hesitate to let her husband know of them. She is an exemplary mother. She is strong and able to stand up against almost unbelievable pressure, distress and anguish. I've seen her do it. She sometimes seems soft and acquiescent to those who

don't know her, but just try to breach one of her foundational beliefs and you will see a veritable volcanic eruption.

As I've watched this family over the years, it remains amazing to me how she handles the role of wife. I am convinced that her husband is largely unaware of how much influence his wife has over him, and how adroitly she handles his unruly moments. She truly respects and loves her husband — a real plus in the long lasting marriage arena — and she lets him know it. I've seen him blow up about this or that, and she simply lets the storm pass, only to make her points later, at a more opportune time, when he's willing to listen. She builds him up in public and in private. She tells him how she has complete confidence in him and in the decisions he will make for their family — and she really does.

I have observed that they almost always make joint decisions about important matters, but sometimes they disagree and this wife will, in no uncertain terms, let her husband know of her concerns and disagreement, but she does yet another remarkable thing: she then supports her husband's right to make the final decision, and she respects him for making it. She always supports his decisions in public or with friends or with other family members. If his decision turns out wrong, she let's it go, knowing that he will surely learn from the experience. If his decision turns out correct, she shows her appreciation of his leadership. She never belittles her husband in front of the children or other people. She tells him often the most powerful words a woman can speak to a man; words so compelling and energizing that a man can achieve almost anything after hearing them; words that are like fuel to a powerful jet engine. She tells him that she is proud of him. You ought to see his face when she says those words to him. If he were hooked up to an electrocardiogram, it would register off the graph.

Yes, this woman is quite remarkable. She has her own identity, and she goes about her own business; she has her own interests and activities. She is intelligent and loves having a good time. She is willing to do almost anything that you might want to do, and at anytime. She is dependable and honorable. She can be trusted with the most delicate secrets a man has — the quiet admission of his fears and weaknesses. She is frugal and always spends the family money wisely, although never enough on herself.

The effect of her ways on her husband is likewise remarkable. He considers her views and her needs and her wishes in every decision he makes. He truly respects and loves her and would not intentionally hurt her. He seeks her advise about nearly everything. He weighs her opinions carefully and considers her position on par with his own. He promotes her and upholds her reputation. He feels completely free to exercise his role in the family. He knows that his wife is going to back him up and support whatever he decides; therefore, he is assiduously careful and thoughtful in his decision-making process. He doesn't fear making judgments and decisions. He doesn't feel like he is competing with his wife for the role of leader of the family. You hear these days that men fear or don't like competing with women in the workplace. Well, let me clear that up. Men don't fear competition. They do some of their best work in a competitive atmosphere. Look at sports, careers, war, hobbies, and games. Men don't fear competition in any of those areas. They do fear, however, competition for their role in the family. And well they should.

There can only be one leader anywhere — family, committee, church, business, government, military. When there are two people vying for this position in the same family, chaos occurs, not to speak of resentment. It is also important to recognize that in order for someone to lead; others must be willing to follow.

As I said previously, there are no perfect marriages. We continue learning and loving our entire lives. The woman I have been discussing, however, provides an excellent example of a godly wife, and she is probably the main reason her marriage has worked. She is also the main reason her husband has grown and achieved. It's as if he became the man she knew he could become; the man she saw in his heart. This woman is a real person, and I've known her over thirty years. She is my wife.

Husbands/Fathers

Let's now turn our focus to the men. In "God's Plan: Scripture #2," instructions to men account for about 62% of the entire passage (instructions to women account for about 21%, with the remaining 17% applying to children). Apparently, God was of the opinion that men were in need of considerably more instruction.

The first instruction, right out of the gate, is for husbands to love their wives. For you young men who are already married and are confident in their love for their wives, don't be too smug. The temptation here is to say (in that very private part of your mind where no one hears you, except God, of course), "Hey, I've got it made. All I have to do is love my wife — and I do — while she has to submit to me in all things. Not a bad deal."

Before you break your arm patting yourself on the back, read further in the passage. Men like to stop at the second comma, not even reading to the end of the first sentence.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water throughout the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.⁵⁵

Clearly, husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. In this passage, as well as throughout the New Testament, the term "church" refers to the entire body of believers. Christ loved the church so much that He died for her. He suffered a torturous death on the cross for the church.

The word "love" clearly denotes action, not simply a feeling. Jesus was willing to do whatever it took to act in the best interest of the church, even to the extent of giving up His life to a humiliating public execution so that the church — you and me — could vicariously earn, through the sacrifice of Jesus, a place in Heaven. Just imagine: He was willing to do whatever it took to save the church and act in its best interest.

⁵⁵ Ephesians 5:25-27; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

Is this the way you love your wife? Are you willing to do whatever it takes to act in her best interest? Where is your focus, on you or on your wife?

The passage continues with more detail. Christ gave Himself up for her (the church):

...to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water throughout the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.⁵⁶

The sacrifices Christ made as a result of His love for the church were made so that the church could be presented to God in a state of absolute, radiant beauty, without blemish of any kind. He acted in the eternal best interest of His bride, the church. Notice that He cleansed her with the “washing with water through the word.” Please remember, I’m not a theologian, but to me this passage means that Christ continually cleanses the church with His word — the Holy Bible. It is His word that keeps us all on track, pointing out our mistakes and consistently pointing us toward the perfection of Jesus and His Lordship over our lives.

What do we have so far? We have a love that is action oriented; a love that focuses on the well-being and best interests of your wife; a love that would hold back nothing where your wife is concerned; a love that would sacrifice everything, even your own life, for the well being of your wife. Don’t miss the overriding goal, however. Christ’s goal is to present His church, without blemish, to the Father. He is most concerned with the eternal well being of the church. In order for husbands to act with this same concern for their wives, they must become the high priests of their households. They must be “in the word” seeking God’s plan and direction by reading His word regularly, with the intensity of an eagle searching for prey, or a brain surgeon performing an operation, or an army of ants performing their tasks. Husbands must act in the best interest of their wives with a single-minded intensity. This is the true expression of love.

Is this the way you love your wives?

The passage continues:

...In this way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.⁵⁷

Men, you are to love your wives with the same personal concern that you have for yourselves. A mentally healthy man is not knowingly going to do something that harms himself, or is not in his best interest. He is concerned with his body, his safety, his health,

⁵⁶ Ephesians 5:26-27; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

⁵⁷ Ephesians 5:28; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

and his well-being. Husbands must show this same concern and respect for their wives. This is one of a thousand reasons why hitting your wife, or physically hurting her in any way is disgusting, pernicious, and antithetical to the entire concept of manhood. We are protectors and lovers of our wives, not mean-spirited tormentors who abuse or intimidate them. Leadership is not domination. Domination causes discouragement, loss of self-respect and it disheartens those who are dominated. Only the weak in mind and intellect, wrapped in a poor self-image, have a need to dominate.

So far in our study of this passage, we have moved from defining a man's love for his wife in terms of her eternal and spiritual well-being, to a definition that encompasses her physical well-being. Husbands are to act in the best interests of their wives both spiritually and physically.

The spiritual provision would necessarily include teaching, intercessory prayer, family leadership, and setting family policy by word and example. The physical provision would include protection and provision for your wife and family. This portion of the Scripture ends with yet another statement, which joins a man's love for his wife to his love for himself.

...He who loves his wife loves himself.⁵⁸

This statement is not meant to come across as hubris, or a narcissistic love for oneself. Rather, it is meant to convey that a man's concern for his wife is at least equal to his concern for himself. It is basic to human nature to be concerned about one's own well-being. We frankly want the very best life has to offer for ourselves. Right? We want to have perfect health, a great career, a respected education, and a respected position in the community. We want safety and freedom to go where we want to go, and to associate with whom we please. We want to be admired. We want to be taken seriously. We want to be a big part of any decision that affects our lives. We want to be heard, and we want to be treated fairly. A man legitimately wants all these things for himself, but that's not the end of the story. He wants all these things for his wife, as well. He is at least as concerned for her well-being as for his own. This is what is meant by loving oneself. The proof of our love for ourselves is found in our genuine concern for our own well-being, not in some lurid, narcissistic, unilateral romance with oneself.

With all this in mind, it is much easier to understand that if a man loves his wife, in the biblical manner of love, then he will also love himself. There are at least two reasons for this in my heart-opinion. First, when a man loves his wife in this "action verb" way, he becomes straight and proud (the type of pride which is the opposite of being ashamed). He knows he is doing God's will, and that knowledge makes his heart sing. When a man is obeying God and performing his rightful role according to divine design, he consequentially loves himself. Self-love comes about only when we obey God and live by His divine design. He is the architect; we are the buildings. Therefore, he who loves his wife

⁵⁸ Ephesians 5:28; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

(obeying God and performing his rightful role) loves himself (is straight and proud of his obedience to God's plan).

The second reason a man loves himself as a consequence to loving his wife finds its core in the passage, which immediately follows....*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a profound mystery...*⁵⁹

The passage begins with "For this reason." It could be reworded, however, as follows: "Because of all this..." Because of this very special love exhibited by a man for his wife, he must leave the home of his parents (that means mentally and physically) and be united with his wife. A man must have no other human being above her in stature, respect, admiration, and action-love. He must leave the home of his youth and join with his wife to build their own home. Having accomplished all this, one of the biggest mysteries of the Bible occurs. The two shall become one flesh. They remain individuals in the eyes of the world, but to God they have become one flesh, although each maintains an individual soul and spirit.

This uniting of two people into one flesh (discussed previously in Scripture #1) takes place as a result of sharing sexual relations as well as sharing common goals and concerns and aspirations. It's like two arrows shot at the same target. On their way to the target, their paths will eventually converge because they are aimed at the exact same spot. It is absolutely imperative that the husband and the wife be headed for the exact same family goals; otherwise each will be shooting at a different target. As a result of becoming one flesh, if you love your wife, it follows that you will love yourself.

For reasons known only to God, He places such a high priority and importance of the God-created state of marriage that when He looks upon a married couple, He sees only one physical entity, although comprised of two souls. This is a mystery we will never understand during our sojourn on planet Earth. This is why divorce is such an emotional rip tide. It rips and tears apart that which God has mysteriously joined.

Divorce: I will not spend much time on the topic of divorce because it is not in God's plan for your life, nor is it the topic of this section. Divorce is, at its core, an aberration of God's plan, which is caused by all manner of human failings, such as selfishness, immaturity, greed, a relentless desire to control or possess, a poor self-image, and so on. When asked what He thought of divorce, Jesus answered:

...“Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.”
⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ephesians 5:31-32; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

⁶⁰ Matthew 19:8-9; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

Jesus also had this to say:

Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

"What did Moses command you?" he replied.

They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."

"It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. "But at the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."⁶¹

Notice that Jesus' emphasis was on God's perfect plan for a married man and woman. He acknowledged that marital unfaithfulness was justification for divorce, but He emphasized that God's plan is the uniting of a man and a woman in a marriage relationship that would not be broken by the emotional rip tide of divorce.

Now, divorce does happen, although I hope it doesn't happen to you. But for those who are reading this who have been divorced, I want you to know that we all fall short of God's ideal — you in one way, and me in another. You are no less a child of God and He loves you just as much now as He did on the day of your conception, when He saw your yet unformed body in your mother's womb...

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.⁶²

⁶¹ Mark 10:2-12; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

⁶² Psalms 139:13-16; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

We all make mistakes. We all sin before God. No one has a perfect marriage. God wants us all to aim toward His ideal in all aspects of our lives. When we stumble, we must go to Him in prayer and confess our failings. Ask for His strength and wisdom to move ahead with our lives in a manner pleasing to Him.

Teach me to feel another's woe, to hide the fault I see; that mercy I to others show, that mercy show to me. Alexander Pope, "The Universal Prayer," (1738), p.10.

All too often divorced people are treated as second-class citizens in the Christian community, as if to say that there is some basic defect in their emotional make-up, or ability to handle life's problems, or some other such nebulous accusation. This type of thinking is smug and drives people away from the church. Sometimes church people forget that the church is for sinners; that's why we all qualify so handily for lifetime memberships.

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*⁶³

Respect: As we continue our study of God's Plan: Scripture #2, we come across one of the most profound statements in the Bible with regard to men. God's final admonition to wives in this passage is:

*"...and the wife must respect her husband."*⁶⁴

This passage provides a deep insight into how men operate. Notice that men are admonished to love their wives, while woman are instructed to submit to, and respect, their husbands.

Although it is clear from reading the body of passages having to do with marriage and family, that love and respect are to flow between husband and wife, this particular passage offers a profound observation: men need the respect of their wives in the same way a windmill needs wind. Imagine a windmill attempting to operate without the enabling power of the wind. There it stands. It looks like a windmill; it feels like a windmill. All of its interior gears are present and operational. The bins are full of grain and are waiting to be processed into flour, and the flour into bread, and the bread into life-giving nourishment for the people of the village. It's all there ready to go, but nothing happens; the job isn't getting done; the mission remains unfulfilled; the people of the village remain hungry and wanting.

Please don't misunderstand. The windmill is not useless without the wind. No, not at all. The strong, well-built fortification can be used as a dwelling, or a tourist attraction, or a storage building; perhaps even a quaint restaurant specializing in Dutch delicacies. If

⁶³ Romans 3:23-24; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

⁶⁴ Ephesians 5:33; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

positioned properly, the windmill might even become a lighthouse, warning ships of a rocky shore. But never, never would it fulfill its mission in life, its calling, the purpose for which it was created. Never, no never would it stand tall and proud and be at peace. Why? Because it was created to be a windmill, not any of those other possible uses.

Now, imagine a windmill blessed with a strong and consistent wind. The blades turn; the gears turn; the grain is processed into flour, and the flour into bread, which then feeds the villagers. The windmill stands tall and proud and erect. Its mission — its calling — is being fulfilled.

The windmill is interested only in improving its technique and its production capacity. It wants to do better; it wants to be better. Yes, the partnership with the wind is a glorious thing to behold, and the entire village is at peace, but let either the windmill stop grinding grain, or the wind stop blowing, and chaos results in the village.

One old, gray villager remarked, with understated sagacity, “You know, it is interesting, I have noticed that as long as the wind is blowing, the windmill has no interest in becoming a dwelling, or a tourist attraction, or a storage building, or a quaint restaurant, or even a lighthouse. I have noticed that as long as the wind is blowing, the heart of the mill is open only to the wind. It is only when the wind stops blowing that the mill looks elsewhere for fulfillment. Yes,” said the time-weathered villager, “this I have noticed.”

Do you understand? A man cannot fulfill his calling as a husband and father without the respect of his wife. Blessed is the man whose wife respects him. And, likewise, blessed is the woman whose husband commands (not demands) respect.

This is one of the great secrets to a successful marriage, and one often missed and entirely overlooked in today’s society. Women are too busy taking on the role of men in the family and men are wandering around looking confused. Men, no one respects an obsequious, pusillanimous man running around without vision or courage, and taking a pole on the basic canons of life so that he will know what he believes.

When a wife truly respects her husband and shows it, he is set free to be the man that is locked inside his heart. He is energized with nuclear fuel to protect, provide for and love his wife.

Wives, your husbands need your respect like a windmill needs wind. Withhold it, and your husband will be wounded in his spirit, and your marriage will surely erode, little by little, like a fire slowly deprived of oxygen. Reluctant as he is to admit it, a man largely sees himself through the eyes of his wife. Her admiration and respect makes him come alive and sore like an eagle. Her disdain causes him to shrivel like a flower plucked from its stem, deprived of life-giving sustenance. The wise wife knows these things in her heart. God somehow placed this knowledge in her, along with the desire to truly respect her husband. What is it, however, that unleashes her displays of respect? It is the biblical love her husband shows for her. This is how the marriage relationship works, and this is a manifestation of how the two actually become one, dependent each on the other. The

success of the marriage relationship requires both parties to do their part in equal measures. The marriage depends upon it.

Now, you might ask which one goes first. Should the wife show this enormous level of respect for an undeserving husband? Or should a husband show biblical love for a wife who doesn't respect him or acknowledge his position of leadership in the family? Well, here is my answer: I don't know! I can suggest, however, that both parties believe in the power of God's plan and simply start, to the best of their ability, walking down the path so carefully laid out before them in Scripture. I can also tell you that when a wife follows these biblical principals, that the husband will notice and his heart will be moved toward God's plan. Again, it's like a key that unlocks the man in his heart. The key, therefore, to a man's heart is respect, not a good meal. I know this because my wife didn't wait for me. She did it God's way from the beginning and I finally got the message and ran to catch up. I would imagine that the same results would occur in the event that the husband jumped in with both feet, showing biblical love to a wife who, perhaps, was lagging behind on her part of the relationship.

Children: The remainder of this fabulously insightful Scripture deals with children. Children are to obey and honor their parents. The importance of these instructions to children is further demonstrated in the fifth of the Ten Commandments:

*Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.*⁶⁵

Here again we encounter voluntary submission, this time to the will of one's parents. You surely see by now that submission is the essential ingredient to the Christian life. Everyone submits to someone, ending in our ultimate submission to God, as is manifested in our obedience to Him. No submission; no obedience. No obedience; no acknowledgment of God's Lordship over our lives. No acknowledgment of God's Lordship equals, without equivocation, our own lordship over our lives.

In the above passage, we again encounter the admonition to "respect." Children are to honor (respect) their parents. This relationship of children to parents is so important that God elevated it to one of the Ten Commandments.

When a child obeys and honors his or her parents, the parents are free to consider the wishes of the child, or to change their minds about something the child wants to do, but was previously denied permission to do. When a child obeys and honors his or her parents, the parents are free to bathe the child in absolute trust. This type of trust translates into unimaginable freedom for the child. A trusted child is allowed to do a lot more than one who is not trusted.

Children, in their quest for adulthood and freedom of choice, incorrectly surmise that rebellion will force their parents to provide more freedom. Children, particularly teenagers,

⁶⁵ Exodus 20:12; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

surmise that freedom of choice is unfairly being withheld from them. To force a corrected course, they determine to get their own way by disobeying and rebelling against the God-given authority of their parents. In this way, they conclude, I will force my parents to “get off my case and let me make my own decisions.”

Well, this simply is not true. The inexperienced and immature mind of a child tends to draw incorrect conclusions from an incomplete fact pattern. A more careful look at the “real world” shows a completely different picture. How do you stay out of jail? By following the rules — obeying. How do you get time off for good behavior if already in jail? By obeying the rules. How do you get a promotion at work? By obeying the rules and doing a better job than your competition. How do you become trusted with the combination to the safe at the office? By honoring your boss and obeying the rules. How do you become a squad leader in the military? By honoring your platoon leader and obeying the rules.

In the real world, the path to freedom of choice and success is to honor and obey. The path to losing your freedom is paved with stones of rebellion and dishonor and self-interest. There can be no harmony in the family unless everyone plays by the rules God has designed. For children, this means obedience and honor to parents. Consider the story of the two ranchers and their two very different horses...

Poncho and Skyline

Mr. Adams and Mr. Weld were both ranchers living in the high mountains of north-central Colorado, near Gould. The area was known for rugged mountains and roaring streams, like the upper Michigan, which teemed with trout and beaver.

Mr. Adams and Mr. Weld each owned two year old colts, born and bred for the high country. Mr. Adam’s colt, named Poncho by the son of the foreman of the ranch, was a beautiful young horse, standing 12 hands high with a stunning chestnut coat.

Mr. Weld’s colt was named Skyline because of his unusual height — 15 hands at only two years old. Skyline was a majestic white color, with a speckled gray flowing mane and tail.

Both horses knew that they were born for the high country, and they both longed to gallop freely through the trails and mountain passes and crystal-clear streams. But this is where the similarities stopped, for these colts lived strikingly different lives.

Poncho lived on a 1,000-acre ranch, which was his to explore. He ran free and played with the other animals, chasing them with superior speed, but then letting them win the contest by darting into a burrow, or diving into a hole in the ground. Poncho would then stomp around and rear up on his powerful hind legs and cry out in mock frustration, but all knew it was a wonderful game, one they all looked forward to. He knew every stream, tree, cave, cliff, and path on the ranch. He knew where to avoid the holes dug by the prairie dogs (he really didn’t care much for prairie dogs) and where the grass was sweet and the breeze gentle. He knew a very special pond on the ranch that glittered in the light of the

setting sun like pure diamonds. He would sometimes watch the fish jump and feed on the hapless insects as they came to rest on the surface of the water. He would run and then he would stand motionless, just listening to the sounds of the wind and the insects and the trees waving in the breeze. Poncho could never get used to the beauty of an Aspen tree in the fall of the year. The brilliant golden leaves rustling in the breeze created a symphony of sound and an artist's pallet of beauty too majestic to absorb. He remembered every smell and every inch of scenery was etched into his memory like a thousand perfect photographs in living color.

Poncho also knew Mr. Adam's whistle, and when he heard that unmistakable sound, Poncho would gallop at full speed back to his stable. Mr. Adams could always count on Poncho to come running when he whistled. He also knew that Poncho would never leave the boundaries of the ranch. Poncho knew that there was great danger in the outside world and that he could get hurt or be stolen if he left the safety of the ranch. As a result, Adams never bothered to lock Poncho's stall, or even the barnyard gate. Poncho was free to come and go as he pleased because Adams could trust him to come when he called and to never leave the boundaries of the ranch.

Skyline, on the other hand, was miserable and angry. He was fully aware of Poncho's freedom and didn't understand why his owner, Mr. Weld, refused to allow him similar freedom to run and roam the ranch. After considerable contemplation and increasing anger and bitterness, Skyline concluded that he had but one sensible course of action. He would once again have to take matters into his own control. If Mr. Weld would only ease up a bit on his restrictions and let him do the things his friends got to do (actually it was only Poncho who got to do those things, the other area ranch horses all lived under various degrees of restrictions, but somehow didn't seem to mind), then all this unpleasantness could be avoided. "I just want to control my own life, without someone telling me what I can do and what I can't do," reflected Skyline, who seemed to have no choice but to show Mr. Weld that he could handle the freedom that he so desperately wanted, and insisted on having it.

With his decision made, one which he had made at various times in the past, Skyline kicked open his stall door and jumped the barnyard fence, breaking the top rail in the process and scrapping the skin off his lower right leg. After exploring the ranch for several hours, with his back leg slightly bleeding, although he didn't realize it, he heard old man Weld calling for him, but Skyline was not about to return — at least not yet, not until old man Weld learned a lesson. In fact, just to show Weld that he is a horse of the world, and perfectly capable of handling any situation, Skyline decided to do the unthinkable — leave the boundaries of the ranch.

Well, two days later, the county sheriff returned Skyline to Mr. Weld, a little worse for the wear. A passing logging truck had injured skyline and beaten and abused by a wild-eyed drunk, who chased the hapless horse for nearly an hour on a dirt bike, causing Skyline's injured leg to start bleeding profusely. In addition, Skyline had not had much to eat or drink, and to top it all off was now lame in the right rear leg, along with a good case of infection.

It was truly a sight to see the sheriff slowly walking the weak and lame horse back into the barnyard. Skyline's head hung low; he couldn't look Mr. Weld in the eye; he was ashamed and angry. Weld looked at Skyline with kind and knowing eyes. He scratched Skyline behind the ears and said, "I've called the vet, ole boy. You'll be okay." Weld thanked the sheriff and took Skyline to his stall to recuperate, but before leaving the rebellious colt, the wise rancher tethered Skyline's two back legs with a strong rope. He, of course, was particularly careful not to worsen the existing wounds. Skyline was more of a prisoner than before, and angrier than ever. He could neither jump nor gallop. He could not even walk properly. He was not only lame, but tethered, too. He was ashamed. If only Weld would learn. If only he understood.

Before leaving Skyline for the evening, Mr. Weld looked sadly at Skyline and quietly whispered in his ear, "If you can't handle the freedom of your stall or the barnyard, how can you possibly handle the freedom of the ranch? You have shown yourself to be unworthy of my trust; therefore, until you show yourself trustworthy in the small things, you shall have no freedom at all."

There is much to learn from these two colts. Both were the same age; one was free, while the other was not. One was trustworthy, while the other was not. One enjoyed complete freedom to do as he wished, within the capacious boundaries of the ranch. The other was a prisoner to his cramped stall. One followed the rules; the other did not.

I have a question for the young men who are reading this story. Which colt do you want to be — Poncho or Skyline?

He who has never learned to obey cannot be a good commander. Aristotle, *Politics* (4th c. B.C.), 3-4, TR. Benjamin Jowett.

Do Not Exasperate Your Children: The final portion of this blue print for family harmony offers an additional admonition to fathers...

*Fathers, do not exasperate you children, instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*⁶⁶

Unfortunately, dads have a tendency to be overbearing to their children. At times, I was one such father. We fathers can too easily forget that our children have thoughts and opinions of their own. They also have precious and delicate feelings. Don't treat your children as if their opinions and observations are not worthy and meaningful. Do not wound their precious, young spirits with harshness, or unreasonable rules, or a refusal to listen to

⁶⁶ Ephesians 6:4; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

them. Guard against frustrating them with pronouncements and edicts that totally disregard their points of view.

The fundamental defect of fathers is that they want their children to be a credit to them. Bertrand Russell, *The New York Times*, June 9, 1963.

In this Scripture, God is warning us fathers against our tendency to anger and frustrate our children. This brings about separation, bitterness, and rebellion in our children.

Where is the line of demarcation between exasperating our children and proper parental control and training? I don't know. But God knows. Ask Him. Ask Him every day in prayer.

Training children: While on the subject of family responsibility, let me remind you fathers that you are responsible for the Christian training of your children. Modern-day men fail miserably in this, spending more time teaching their children how to ride a bike than they do teaching Christ's plan of salvation.

You say you're a Christian? Answer the following questions:

1. Do you pray in front of your children? Do your children ever see you pray?
2. Do you teach your children how to pray?
3. Do you read the Bible to your children? Do you read the Bible privately? Do you study the work of God?
4. Do you teach you children that the Bible is God's truth and His inerrant word?
5. Do you talk about God to your family? You talk about countless things that are important to you – politics, career, health, money, sports, family, hobbies. But do you talk about God? Why would your children assume that God is important to you when you never talk about Him?
6. Do you clearly teach the truths and doctrines of Christianity? Do your children know the plan of salvation? Are you helping them to know how to make a decision for Christ?
7. Do you take responsibility for getting your family to church and Sunday School?

These questions come from what I call The Seven Duties of a Teaching Father:

1. Pray with your family.
2. Teach your children to pray.

3. Read the Bible privately and to your children.
4. Teach your children that the Bible is the inerrant word of God.
5. Talk about God to your children.
6. Teach the major doctrines of the faith to your children.
7. Take you family to church.

If your answers are no to many (or even all) of the above questions, then one or more of the following must be true:

- a) You are a Cultural Christian, but you are NOT a born again (saved) Christian. These things are just not that important to you.
- b) You don't think all that instruction is necessary. After all, you might turn the child off of religion altogether, and besides, the child should decide matters of religion for himself – it's a private matter.
- c) You are embarrassed and feel inadequate to take on these duties. Isn't that the mother's job, or the pastor's job?
- d) You are a new Christian and new to being a family leader. You just didn't realize what your duties were in the eyes of the Lord.

My guess is that most fathers who do not practice The Seven Duties of a Teaching Father, fall into a mixture of the first three categories, with the fourth category coming in at second place, followed by the fifth category. Ultimately, however, you must agree, if you're honest with yourself (and me), that Christianity is not real to you (category 'd' excepted, of course). If it were real, would it not follow that you would do everything in your power to make sure your wife and children spend eternity in heaven (rather than hell)? Would it not be your most important job, the subject of your greatest focus? If there really is a God, how could anything be more important than knowing what He thinks, and what His instructions and commandments are through the study (not just reading) of His inspired word? Wouldn't you want your family to know the rules by which God requires us to live? Of course you would. But since you don't do these things, only one conclusion can be drawn: God is not real to you (again, category-d, accepted)!

God is not real to a father who can say that his son should decide for himself on matters of religion. This father is treating religion like a preference for a political party – some like this one, and some that one; you choose. A Christian dad knows that there is but one God, and that all other gods are false. He knows that truth is mutually exclusive. He knows that Jesus is truth; therefore, if his son were to choose any other god, rather than the one true God, that he would be lost for eternity. Is that the sort of decision you leave to chance, or the ruminations of an immature mind. That's utterly ridiculous!

God is not real to the father who can say that he is embarrassed to teach religious matters to his daughter. Don't you imagine that Jesus was a bit embarrassed at hanging naked from the cross, so that your sins could be forgiven? On second thought,

embarrassed you should be: embarrassed to possess so little strength of character and purpose; embarrassed to love so little; embarrassed at being so irresponsible; embarrassed at passing on your fatherly responsibilities to your wife (and you wonder why she doesn't respect you?) or the pastor. Your wife and your pastor should play a very important role in the Christian education of your children, but the responsibility is yours.

Harsh? Perhaps. Hard to look in a mirror, isn't it. It was for me. I know all about this because I fell into categories 'a,' 'c,' and 'd'. Did you think that being a father was going to be easy – mom does it all? You never looked into the requirements from God's viewpoint, did you? Men repeatedly show weakness in the leadership of their families and then wonder why their families don't respect them. Men, you don't lead by popular vote. You lead in response to duty and honor as instructed in the word of God.

Well, there you have it. God's plan for the family includes children honoring their parents and being obedient to them. It includes the submission of wives to their husbands. God's plan further requires that wives respect their husbands. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church, and as they love their own bodies. Husbands are then to submit to the Lordship of Christ. As long as this plan of responsibility is maintained, then the family is structured within God's plan, and He provides great protection to wives and children for the inadvertent mistakes of the husband and father. It's as if the parents provide a big umbrella over the children. This umbrella provides great protection from harm. But step out from under the umbrella and you are on your own, without God's protection.

The husband provides the same type of protective umbrella for his wife. As long as she remains safely under his protection, she will be spared much danger, heartache and pain. But step out from under the husband's protection and she is on her own. This protection provided by husbands is not of their own strength, but rather comes from God. It is His plan and His protection, as manifested through the husband. This mysterious, God-provided protection is available, however, only if the husband is under the umbrella of the Father, and the wife under the umbrella of the husband. You cannot avail yourself of God's blessings and protection if you refuse to obey Him, and operate under His rules. Wives, place yourself under the protection of your husband even if you know, or suspect, that he is not fully submitted to God the Father. Why? Two reasons: First, you then are obeying God, and your obedience should not depend upon the obedience or lack of obedience of another. That makes no sense. There will always be disobedience around you. Should you allow the sins of others to determine your eternal fate? Should you allow the attitudes of others to determine your attitude? Second, your godly example could be the tangible evidence of Christian faith and commitment needed by your husband to turn him toward God.

As I stated previously, there are no perfect marriages, but God has given us His plan and His ideal. He has provided a target to shoot at and a goal to aspire to, but He sets the rules. If you don't play by the rules, you can't expect to win.

Imagine being on a baseball team and deciding you don't like the rules. You decide that four strikes are better than three, and that any fly ball you hit is a home run. You are tired of those ever-present fielders catching your hits. Now, how many games do you think you would win? How many teams would want to draft you? And here is yet another question: what sense does it make to allow every player to determine his own rules?

In the discussion at hand, God created the family and He set the rules. If you don't play by them, you can't expect to win.

Leadership

At the beginning of this section, I mentioned the sad state of affairs families are in, and the animosity, which seems to be growing between men and women. I asked who was to blame. Well, it's time to answer that question more specifically. Who's to blame? Men are to blame. They are responsible under God's plan for the well-being of the family. Men are to provide the leadership and set policy for the family. Therefore, if the American family is in danger of extinction, or at least crippling wounds, then the buck stops at the door of the head of the family — the husband, the father, the man.

Men are simply not providing the leadership they are responsible for providing. Exactly what is leadership and how is it manifested? I can't provide a slick one-liner for a definition, but I can provide a spiritual example from the Bible, followed by a list of twenty-four manifestations of leadership that I have noticed over the years. Put them all together and you have a definition.

First, the Bible story: The story begins with Paul and Silas in jail in Philippi. They were thrown into jail on trumped-up charges, without a hearing or a trial, because they were preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. At about midnight, as Paul and Silas were praying and singing, there came a violent earthquake, which shook the foundations of the jail. Miraculously, all the cell doors flew open and all the prisoners' chains came loose.

At this, the jailer awoke and reached for his sword to kill himself, for he knew that he would be held responsible for the escape of the prisoners. Paul, however, called out to the jailer saying, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer was so astounded and grateful that none of prisoners attempted to escape that he went to Paul, recognizing his great character and belief in his God, and asked, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household." Following this and subsequent discussions, the jailer and his entire family were baptized.⁶⁷

This story — together with many other such stories in the Bible — clearly depicts the mandate of men as family leaders and the bearers of ultimate responsibility. Notice that Paul understood this responsibility when he said that the jailer and his household would be saved. Paul knew that if the husband and father was convinced of the truth of the gospel, that his family would follow his example.

⁶⁷ Acts 16:25-34; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

There is little doubt that a belief in Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior had never entered the minds of the jailer's family members. They were going about their business in Philippi, a blatantly pagan community in a pagan world. All sorts of gods (little 'g') were available to the jailer's family; they didn't need another. But immediately upon learning the truth of Paul's message, the jailer went to his family and told them about Paul, and about Jesus, and about the miraculous events of the evening. The jailer made sure that his family knew the truth of the gospel message and he made sure they were baptized. He led them to salvation through Jesus. He was a leader! He went there first, and then led his family by example.

Notice that this was not a cerebral exercise. The jailer was not yet schooled in the faith, nor could he defend the faith, or explain its finer points. He just knew what was in his heart and he acted on it. Notice also that his first contact after hearing the truth from Paul was with his family. He knew that it was his job to present the truth of the Lord Jesus to his family. He didn't wait for his wife to do it, nor did he wait for a pastor to come to town to do it; he didn't even ask Paul to do it. He did it!

There is yet another lesson to this story. Did you notice that the jailer finally got the message only after Paul had demonstrated his faith — his religion, if you will — by not leaving the jail when the earthquake struck, and the doors flew open, and the shackles fell off. Paul was put in jail, although unjustly, by the governmental authorities and he would not leave until released by the authorities. Furthermore, Paul knew what would happen to the jailer if the prisoners escaped. Paul, therefore, demonstrated great restraint and kindness by not running from the jail. Although the jailer had undoubtedly heard Paul's words many times before, as Paul and Silas preached to the other prisoners, it wasn't until Paul demonstrated his faith and kindness that the jailer got the message. There are always people watching you — whether a few or many — and they are your observers. Remember, *your observers more attention pay to what you do than what you say.* Ultimately, Christianity can only be demonstrated, not preached.

Now, for the list of twenty-four manifestations of leadership...

Leadership is:

1. Working hard;
2. Going there first to show the way and set the example;
3. Coaching all those for whom you are responsible;
4. Listening before answering;
5. Being open to new ideas;
6. The ability to discern right from wrong;
7. Seeing what needs to be done and doing it, or making sure it is done by others;
8. Taking action;

9. The ability to see the big picture;
10. Fairness in the face of unfairness;
11. Never compromising basic principals — always willing to compromise a process;
12. Standing alone — the willingness to make unpopular decisions;
13. The ability to do unpleasant tasks;
14. Standing for something;
15. The ability to set worthy goals and then encourage others to their attainment;
16. Being achievement oriented;
17. The ability to delegate and do only what only you can do — don't take back a task that has been delegated;
18. The willingness and ability to follow-up — to inspect what you expect (my daughter hates it when I say that);
19. Having vision;
20. Caring about those you lead — acting in the best interest of all;
21. Willing to be responsible.
22. Not penalizing people for integrity;
23. Standing up under pressure; and
24. Standing up under praise. (The most difficult of all!)

You see, a lot of men get it all wrong. The immature mind equates leadership with ordering people around and having uncompromising control over people. Leadership to the immature, underdeveloped mind is considered a privilege, a rank, or a high standing. Well, that is not leadership. That is demagoguery. Furthermore, leadership isn't a privilege; it is a responsibility — heavy, unrelenting responsibility. And in order to lead, someone must be willing to follow. People usually are not willing to follow someone who does not have their best interest at heart.

The leader must know, must know that he knows, and must be able to make it abundantly clear to those about him that he knows. Clarence B. Randall, *Making Good in Management* (1964).

So, who is at fault for the crippled state of the family? We are! Men are! When you have the responsibility of leadership for your family, the buck stops with you. You can't blame your wives for filling a vacuum. The vacuum should not have existed to begin with. We must claim our position in the family and we must provide leadership, and we must love our wives as Christ loved the church.

It is not easy being a man. We have weighty responsibility of the family — crushing responsibility — but this is our job, our calling, and our mission. Stand tall and proud, young men. Show the world what a real man is all about. Your manhood is not to be defined by women, or the circumstances of birth, wealth, power, strength, or stature. Your manhood is to be defined by God, who created you in His image to do His will on earth and with your family (just as a woman’s femininity is, likewise, to be defined by God). Let the manifestations of your manhood be love, gentleness, strength of resolve, wisdom, leadership, protection, and provision. Consider the following passages:

*Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*⁶⁸

*If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*⁶⁹

Take joy in your manhood and in all things male. Thank God for the responsibility He has entrusted you with. Rejoice in being all that you were created to be. If you do it God’s way, you will be blessed and your prayers will not be hindered.

Go get ‘em, men! And never, never admit that you can sew on a button!

“Men build bridges and throw railroads across deserts, and yet they contend successfully that the job of sewing on a button is beyond them. Accordingly, they don’t have to sew buttons. Heywood Broun, “Holding a Baby,” Seeing Things at Night (1921).

⁶⁸ 1 Peter 3:7; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

⁶⁹ 1 Timothy 5:8; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

THEREFORE

1. Men have lost their sense of maleness.
2. Men today look too often to women for definition.
3. Men today are belittled in T.V. commercials and the entertainment media. It is almost socially unacceptable to be a man.
4. Dads are providing inadequate instruction and example to their children.
5. Men are slowly being “re-tooled” to act and think in a manner unnatural to their genetic predispositions.
6. Society is in danger of losing its fabric — shape, form, and mission.
7. The root cause is the unwillingness of families to follow God’s plan.
8. God’s Plan for Families:
 - a. Belief in the Bible as the inerrant, indisputable word of God.
 - b. God created the institution of marriage, and He set up certain rules to follow.
 - c. God created man and woman to be equal in His sight, but with different talents and abilities, which are perfectly suited to the accomplishment of their differing roles (missions) in life.
9. In the family structure, women are to be a helpmate to their husbands, and they are to submit to the leadership of their husbands. They are also commanded to respect their husbands. In the family structure, men are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. They are to provide leadership, provision, and protection. They are to be the high priests of their families.
10. Divorce is not part of God’s plan. If divorce is in your past, then take it to Him in prayer and then go on with your life. You are not a second-class citizen, and you are precious in His sight.
11. Children are to obey and honor their parents.
12. Fathers are not to exasperate their children.
13. Leadership of the family is required of men. It is difficult to define, but there are at least twenty-four different manifestations of leadership, which can provide insight.

Application to Everyday Life

1. When we refuse to acknowledge God's design for families and His Lordship over our lives, we are headed inexorably for failure. If you want a happy marriage and family, do it God's way.
2. Men, don't ever let women define your manhood. They are not qualified to do so, and if you allow them to be the potter and you the clay, they will lose all respect for you. God has designed you for a specific role. His design is not faulty. You react to certain stimuli because He designed you that way. You respond in particular ways to certain situations because God pre-wired you that way. You feel certain fears, joys, urges, and impulses because God injected those emotions into the male psyche. You enjoy certain activities and loathe others because God infused certain predilections into the male personality. Rejoice in being a man and look to God for definition and identity.
3. Let your leadership be marked by going there first, and then encouraging others to follow your example (your example, not your orders).
4. Let your authority in the family be marked by patience, understanding, and love — great love, action love.
5. Pierce your hand of discipline with the sword of compassion.
6. Make major decisions only after consulting God and then your wife. I find that God often speaks to me through the heart and mind of my wife. Be gentle and kind with your wife and children. Remember, your wife is your equal, you just have differing roles. Your wife is your partner through the journey of life.
7. Be slow to anger (as the Bible teaches) and quick to forgive. Unbridled anger is a cancer. Forgiveness heals the deepest of wounds. Forgiveness is a powerful medication that is not often used because it is misunderstood. Most people mistakenly believe that forgiveness is a gift to the wrongdoer, given magnanimously by the one wronged. Although forgiveness could certainly be used in this way — and often is — it was, I believe, designed by God to heal and restore the heart of the one who was hurt or wronged. Forgiveness is our own special wonder drug, which we can self-administer when deeply wounded in our spirit. Put another way, forgiveness is for the giver, not necessarily the receiver. It is the only way a punctured and mortally injured heart can be healed. When you have been wronged, but choose to forgive, the bitterness, anger and hurt flow out of the wounded heart and are washed away. Healing can then begin.
8. Choose your wives carefully, young men in my family. Your ultimate choice will bring you heaven or hell on earth.
*"A foolish son is his father's ruin, and a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping."*⁷⁰
*"Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife."*⁷¹
*"A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping on a rainy day."*⁷²
"A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life."⁷³

⁷⁰ Proverbs 19:13; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

⁷¹ Proverbs 24:24; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

⁷² Proverbs 27:15; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

⁷³ Proverbs 31:10-12; The Holy Bible; New International Version.

part five

**CONFESSIONS OF A FATHER
&
OTHER THOUGHTS**

CONFESSIONS OF A FATHER And Other Thoughts

Just Me, Only Me

If you respect me at all, if you love me, do not think of me in terms I cannot live up to. Do not think of me as a man who has done everything right, for I have not done everything right. I have made every mistake you have made and more, and I have grieved the Holy Spirit. When I remember my sins, I become morose and greatly despondent. My soul becomes grieved and my spirit gasps for air, my chest heaves. My eyes fill with tears and I feel sick, like the burning of stomach acid coming up into your throat.

Now, I am not going to relate my sins to you, here, for it's really none of your business. The specifics are between God and me, but I want you to know the pain I feel at my failures.

If you respect me at all, if you love me, do not think that I have it all together and all figured out. I have news for you. None of us have it all together, and none of us have it all figured out. People only try to make you think that they have all the answers so that they can feel superior.

If you respect me at all, if you love me, do not think that Dad sets an example that cannot be reached. The truth is that I have set a pretty good example as far as you know, but the truth is that my private actions, in some cases, and my private thoughts, in many cases, have not been good examples. God knows the example I have set. God knows when my private life has not been in concert with my public life. I have heard it said that the true measure of a man's character is what he does (and thinks, and contemplates) when alone, or when it would be impossible for anyone he knows to discover his actions. This is true, isn't it? A man of true character, displays a private life that is a mirror image of his public life. That's real character. That's a real man!

If you respect me at all, if you love me, don't expect more of me than I can deliver. I am a perfect example of imperfection. I am a father, a grandfather, a father-in-law, an uncle, a husband, a brother, a son, and a nephew. I am all of these things, and I am trying to do a good job at all these roles, but I fall short.

Did you know that dads desperately want to be loved? A dad makes hard decisions for his family that often makes him unpopular. He sacrifices for his family. You young men will discover that you will have no money while raising your family. You will not have the things you want, or be able to go places you want to go, or dress the way you would like, or drive the kind of car you like because you will not be able to afford it. You will work very hard to provide for your family, and they will not always understand. You see, the role of provider is ridiculed in today's society, but it is part of

the genetic makeup of a man. Women should never ridicule such an important part of a man's makeup. A dad will work long hard hours for his family, so that they can have opportunities and an abundant life. But sometimes he is not appreciated for this effort and sacrifice. He is accused of being a workaholic or disinterested in his family or any number of additional evils. In truth, he is just trying to provide. He is trying to do a good job. Now, here are a few things I've learned over the years...

An Audience of One

Arrogance is a strange disease. I hope it never infects you. But if it does, you may take notice that those who have not achieved your station in life will look at you with some degree of contempt (which is envy masked). On the other hand, those who have achieved a greater station in life than you will look at you with patronizing contempt (which is pride masked). The only person who will be truly impressed with you is you. Indeed, you will have an audience of one.

False Humility

I have learned that false humility (defined as humility advertised) is nothing more than the acute stage of the disease of arrogance. It fools no one and makes everyone nauseous but the one who has it.

The Greatest Saltlick in Life

In the mountains of Colorado, the home of my heart, ranchers will sometimes put a saltlick out for the animals. A saltlick is a large block of salt, or salty substance, which all kinds of animals, especially deer, love to lick. When a saltlick is available, you can be assured of a plentiful supply of wildlife in the area.

The greatest saltlick in life is the love of Jesus shining through you, exhibited in part by the non-judgmental acceptance of people where they are. Remember, it is God's job, not yours, to move a person to a deeper level of life and understanding. But remember also, you can and should judge the actions of people; otherwise you will sit among fools.

You should be aware, however, that saltlicks exist that are comprised of artificial salt. It tastes like salt, and it looks like salt, but it is an evil imitation. These saltlicks likewise draw people - searching people - to them with the promise of love and acceptance. Beware of these artificial lures, for they produce only despair and agony. How can you tell the difference in a genuine saltlick and a fraud? There is a book which, if carefully read, describes both the real and the artificial saltlicks in great detail. Read this book and you will be well prepared to discern the difference. The book is called The Holy Bible. If, however, you need a quick check of authenticity, simply ask yourself this question: Is this saltlick pointing toward Jesus and what He stands for, or away from Him?

A Moment of Ecstasy

Young men in my family, know this: A moment of ecstasy, no matter how great, is NOT worth a lifetime of hurt and sorrow and ruined reputation. And know this: Every time you make such a decision, it will be discovered and, so to speak, published in your local newspaper. Do only those things that bring dignity to you, your family and your God. To the extent that you have already done things that would bring shame to you, your family and your God, confess those things to Him who can forgive you, and do them no more.

Do it With Excellence

All you do should be done with excellence. What you do is a reflection on your life, your family, and your God. Why on earth would you want your name associated with anything poorly done? If you try to do everything with excellence, but for some reason fail, people will know that you tried and they will overlook the failure. But if you do not try to do a task with excellence, all will know that you did not try and they will label you a loser. This is life. Don't blame the labelers, look to yourself.

The Biggest Hurt of All

The deepest, most wrenching pain in the world is the loss of a loved one, a family member. That loss, I believe, is greatly magnified when the loved one is still among the living. Discord, anger, burning disagreements, estrangement – these are family destroyers. Sometimes a family member will lead his or her life such that there can be only one ultimate result: failure and disaster, heartache and deep despair. Sometime there is nothing a parent or other family member can do – the course is set, the outcome assured. The pain of a parent watching a child self-destruct on an unalterable course is gut wrenching, and deep sorrow personified.

I have prayed for God to heal my family, but so far He has chosen otherwise. I know He has a reason.

The Unbending Limb Breaks

All of us think we are right in all, or nearly all, of our ways. Each of us, in our own estimation, is absolutely right, and others are not. Well, allow me to tell you what I've learned. I have been right about half the time, thinking, of course, that I was right 100% of the time. The correct position on a matter can only be found in the Word of God, or His prompting of our spirits. The only truth is His Word. Everything else, yes everything else, is up for compromise. Let's all cut the other guy some slack. Those who are strident and unyielding, preachy and arrogant will break and fall away from the tree of loving relationships.

THE DECISION

This is the day you must decide. You will decide for the Lord Jesus, or you will decide against Him. But there is a type of fear or dread or uneasiness in you that keeps you from letting go and accepting Christ, right? Where does that fear or dread or uneasiness come from? Answer: deep within the human spirit. There are many reasons people don't come to a saving knowledge of Christ; some are incredibly complicated with the intertwining twists and weaves of the human condition; the complexities of personality, self-image, self-esteem, pride, lust, and all the rest. We'll start with the simple, and then work up from there.

Lack of Knowledge: Some people have not come to Christ because of a lack of knowledge about Him. These people are not necessarily in the jungles of South America or Africa. They are not necessarily in China or North Korea. They can be right here in small town USA, next door to you.

These people, for whatever reason, simply have no real knowledge of God or His gospel message. Horribly, you will also find a number of these people on the membership rolls of Christian churches.

Why don't they have knowledge of Christ? I think that there are two major reasons: 1) They were never told about Jesus, or 2) They didn't hear the message presented to them. Or, those two reasons could be combined: They weren't told in an effective manner and, therefore, didn't hear the message.

Regardless of why these people have a lack of knowledge, it is the job of every Christian to convey and relate the gospel message to those with whom we come in contact, each according to his or her own style, gifts and predilections. There are countless people out in the world who are just waiting to hear about God and who will make a decision for Him.

Father in Heaven, I pray for a desire — a deep burning desire — in my heart to somehow, in the right way, at the right time, and according to Your will share my faith with those who have not heard about You. I also pray that every living person will hear the gospel message and will have the opportunity to DECIDE FOR YOU. In Jesus' precious name I pray. Amen and Amen.

Pride: Another reason for not coming to Christ, and a powerful deterrent, is pride. Pride keeps you from surrendering to Him; from submitting to Him; from loving Him; from letting yourself be loved by Him; from giving your life to Him. After all, you have your professional image to consider. You don't really want to be known as one of those Bible-thumpers. The more thumping they do, the less you trust them. You are much too dignified for that sort of thing. You can't imagine yourself making a public spectacle of yourself by 'walking the aisle,' as the evangelicals call it. You never could see the necessity of publicly declaring your religious beliefs for all to examine, like laundry hanging on the line. Frankly, the thought of it makes you feel sort of low class — moved to extremes by emotion. You honestly don't want to be a part of the group that you have seen become 'saved,' as they call it. It seems so common, completely throwing one's intellect out as the emotion comes in. Why can't we just quietly and privately determine that we believe in God and get on with our lives? Why such a big deal; why is so much made of a decision? You, after all, are an educated professional. What would your co-workers think? Oh! You know what they would think, that you had gone off the deep end — over the edge. Your good, solid judgment would be in serious doubt. And, what would you tell your spouse; your kids? You would look so foolish, so simple-minded. How can you be expected to give up your life to an unseen God? Oh, you believe that a supreme being created all life and the heavens, and so on. But, you really don't see this Supreme Being as exactly personal. Surely being a good person, parent, and citizen will suffice. Right? It's not like you need a lot of help. You make a good living and are in need of nothing. Matter of fact, you do quite well on your own. You don't really need anyone's help. You can pretty much handle life on your own.

Well, I'll tell you something about pride. As the Scripture reads, "Pride goes before a fall." Pride is what drove Lucifer and a third of the angels from Heaven. Pride is the most dangerous condition befalling mankind. Pride puffs up, bloats, and inflates our self-image to the point of replacing the worship of God — our creator — with the worship of self — the created. Pride keeps us from God like insect repellent wards off insects. It's also hard to identify in one's self because it distorts our view of reality — like standing in a hall of mirrors. We see things through a full belly — there's no spiritual hunger.

Pride allows for no self-doubt, or inward reflection. It allows no possibility for being wrong, or insufficient to the task. It allows no one to get too close. Why? Because you might be found out. And you don't want that degree of intimacy, even with yourself. In your heart of hearts, you know your weaknesses and vulnerability, but you don't want to explore those waters. Truth be known, your pride protects you from having to deal with who you really are. It is your protective shield, and you're not giving that up for anyone. Not anyone! You'd be nothing otherwise. Nothing! Broken. Without your pride you would have a very poor self-image, but with it, you have a stellar self-image. You are someone. Someone to be respected and to be dealt with. You can't give that up. And why should you?

Pride is actually a slow-growing cancer to the spirit. It causes one to reject God until it's too late. No medication or treatment can cure it. It's always malignant, never benign. It will cost you your eternal existence in Heaven, but will insure your eternal existence in the Place of Separation. It will consume your spirit. It is insidious, and powerful, and always deadly.

There is but one cure: surrender to the Lord, your God. Take your strength from the One who possesses all strength; look to Him for your self-image, the One who gives freely of indestructible self-images. Your self-image is frail, tenuous, and assailable because you look into a mirror, through your own eyes, to see yourself as you imagine others see you. Whereas an unassailable self-image emerges from looking into the heart of the Creator-God, to see yourself as He sees you.

If you do this, if this is your decision, you must let others know of this decision. Why? Because Jesus died in public disgrace to provide salvation for you. You need to accept that salvation publicly as well. If you hide your faith, then it is not faith at all. If you are embarrassed about your beliefs, then you have no real belief. If you say you believe, but then refuse to acknowledge your faith before others, then pride is your god, and pride will destroy you. Give up the pride or it will consume your spirit, as does a fierce disease. Jesus is waiting for you. He underwent a torturous death to save you. He longs for you and sheds tears for you. He hungers with great passion for you. He grieves for your soul. He doesn't want you to be lost to the Place of Separation. Give up the cancer of pride and accept the sweet salvation Christ has waiting for you. Do it now! And then tell someone.

Father in Heaven, I pray for those who are consumed by the sin of pride. Free them from the bonds of this deadly condition. Pride separates Your people from You; it puffs up, and distorts, and causes twisted thinking. It magnifies self instead of You. Father, only You can break these bonds; only You can free the spirit from the shackles of deadly pride. Father, send Your Holy Spirit to speak the truth to Your people caught up in pride, and free them to love and obey You. In Your holy name I pray. In Jesus' precious name I pray. Amen and Amen.

Control: Another reason people do not surrender to Christ is also found deep in the human spirit: control. You want to be in control, not be controlled. You want to live your life the way you want to — you deserve that much. You've worked hard. And you certainly don't want to be controlled by the dictates of some religion, espousing a bunch of man-made rules. Rules, rules, rules! You know best what is right for your life.

As you think back on it, you've always wanted to be in control, not only of your own life, but also the lives of those with whom you interact. You want to be in control at work,

and in control of your friends, and in control of your spouse, and children. And you certainly want to control your family's opinions — friends, too. It's for their own good. You are a natural leader and in most cases know what's best for yourself and others.

This intense, burning desire to be in control is the second reason Lucifer and his bunch were cast out of Heaven. The disease of control is almost as deadly as that of pride.

The truth is, man cannot be saved to eternity with the Creator-God as long as he insists on being in control. If you can't put God in control of your life, then He is not your Lord — you are! The desire for control separates you from Christ. It pits you against Him. You see, only one can be in control — either God is in control, or you are. If you insist on being in control, then you will never be able to approach God. Why? Because you are elevating yourself to His level — trying to take His job, if you will. You are challenging Him; substituting your will for His; placing yourself first, along with your perceived superior judgment.

In addition, the notion that anyone is in control of anything or anyone is truly absurd. You don't control where you are born, or to which parents. You don't control the color of your skin, or eyes, or hair. You don't control your native intelligence, or the diseases you might contract. You don't control the nation of your birth or the conditions into which you are born. Likewise you don't control the weather, the stock market, or whether the milk you bought was pasteurized properly. And, you don't and cannot control other people. Even the Creator-God refuses to control His people, allowing them free will.

Put God in control of your life now. Put the control where it belongs. To do this requires an amount of faith, and surrender. It requires humility. These are the attributes that please God. Give up your will to Him and trust Him to work in your best interest.

Trusted Heavenly Father, please forgive those who, knowingly or unknowingly compete with You for control of their lives. Teach them the futility of striving to control circumstances, lives, opinions, actions and all the rest. Plant deep in the hearts of such as these the penetrating desire to allow You to control their lives, in every respect. Help them to trust You to guide and direct them through the agonies, the perils, the offensive mistakes, and, yes, even the good times of their lives. This, I pray knowing this is in Your wondrous will. In Jesus' precious name I pray. Amen and Amen.

Just Don't Want To: Another reason people don't surrender to God is because they simply 'don't want to.' They enjoy their life-style; they enjoy the activities in which they are

involved. They are quite comfortable with their attitudes, mind-set and ways. They ‘just don’t want to.’

This type of person is, at the core, hedonistic and hard-of-heart. He or she is into a lifestyle that is enjoyable, pleasing, and satisfying. You might say: What could possibly be wrong with that?

It’s the hedonism itself that’s wrong. To one such as this, the chief aim in life is pleasure. Pleasure is to be coveted, sought after, and lusted after, like one dying of thirst would seek water. The soul longs for providing pleasure to self. Self is the focus, and envy and covetousness are the necessary fruits of this mind-set. The spirit is, therefore, lethargic, and the spirit is quenched, knowing nothing of God and desiring Him not.

The ‘don’t-want-tos’ do not want to change their focus. They don’t like the concept, of course, of not being in control of their own lives, and they are prideful as well. Most of us have the control and pride problem — it comes with the human condition. But, the ‘don’t-want-tos’ really have a serious problem with the Christian teachings of service to others (first) and morality.

Service to others, prior to meeting all of one’s own needs, seems decidedly ludicrous, and, frankly, altogether weak and deleterious to one’s well being. The ‘don’t-want-to’ people grab at life rapaciously.

And then, there’s this Christian concept of morality, especially sexual morality. What’s that all about? Sex is like a good oatmeal-raisin cookie: it’s to be enjoyed anywhere, anytime, and as often as possible. Commitment and marriage are not part of the recipe.

The ‘don’t-want-tos’ consider the entire issue of ethical behavior to be situational. They take umbrage with the notion of absolutes, as in right and wrong, or that morality has a provenance dating back to God, Himself. The ‘don’t-want-tos’ define ethics or morality for themselves, to suit the situation at hand, and so that maximum pleasure is provided, and their current lifestyle justified. A common condition of the human race is to justify one’s actions. Some seek justification from God, others from self, through a series of jumbled arguments crafted to meet the desired hypothesis.

Now, don’t think for a minute that the ‘don’t-want-tos’ consist of only ethically or morally degenerate people. Not so at all. In fact, many of this group are seen as good, solid citizens. Some do charity work — not connected with church, of course. Others are seen as trustworthy in the community and in their place of employment. But, deep down inside — in that deeply hidden place — there is something they are holding on to that they will not give up. It might be drinking too much, drugs, pornography, an affair, living with someone outside of marriage, homosexuality, an extremely poor self-image that simply must be fed with haughtiness, arrogance, power over others, fear of being rejected (even

by God), dreadful sin (or, not so dreadful sin, but sin nevertheless), a past abortion, a murder, stealing, lying, inability to face the truth, gluttony for food, gluttony for money or success or fame, an insatiable desire to promote oneself, extreme craving for power, a desire to be worshiped, a grumbling and caustic attitude, acrimony toward people in general and in your family, a deep soul-destroying veneration of education and learnedness and credentials. Or, it could be that one simply does not believe in God at all, and does not intend to further visit the question.

It is my observation that the two largest groups within the 'don't-want-tos' are those living immorally and those who venerate education. Those living immorally enjoy it. Immorality is a natural course for mankind and it is, according to the Scriptures, the only sin against one's own body. Immorality, especially the sexual type, changes people inside their souls. It creates appetites and carnivorous desires that lead down a definable path to destruction of self, careers and family. Immorality is pleasurable to the body and temporarily feeds the ravenous monster of lust that dwells deep inside many, but it scars our spirits and destroys lives. Immorality is like hard-core drugs, which provide pleasure instantly, but slowly creates an insatiable craving that leads to destruction. In the same way, immorality is addictive, and will lead to sorrow so deep that your very soul will cry out uncontrollably.

The other major sub-group of the 'don't-want-tos' is the worshipers of education. Education is, of course, a good thing, a worthy pursuit and necessary to the improvement of self and the human race. Education is critical and necessary. Having said that, I am not speaking here about the worthiness of education, but of a rapacious need for it, deep in the spirits of some.

Education can become an object of worship and envy, to be sought after and possessed at any cost. When acquired, as if anyone could actually acquire or possess it, education, which is attested to by the college degrees one has and the initials after one's name, provides membership to an elite club. And, that club has certain membership levels: Master's Degree; Ph.D.; Th.D.; DBA; JD; Harvard; Yale; Oxford; Cambridge, or the lesser degrees and universities. It's all so organized. One can work hard and move up the ladder of the sociological hierarchy to a definable spot, where one is clearly more capable than, more clever than, smarter than, more ambitious than, more respected than, more important than, and, yes, simply better than all those possessed with less educational rank.

Although not all people who obtain terminal degrees and who have excelled in their disciplines are worshipers of education, the educational gluttons certainly are, and they look solely to education to provide self-image, status and worthiness. Why? Because they need these things desperately — as all human beings do — and find that they, themselves, can work for and achieve their own deep need for self-respect and the respect and admiration of the world. Christians, on the other hand, look to God to provide all these things.

The educational gluttons are close kin to the prideful and controllers, but are differentiated by having this one powerful tool to hang on to: the pursuit of, and obtaining of education.

The educational gluttons are normally of one mind — in a general sense. That is to say: Truth is defined by the overall consensus of the community of educated elite. The community of educated elite does not and cannot accept the concept of a personal Lord and Savior God. Why? Because they have already ascribed to the throne of supreme human beings. A supreme God would dethrone them. Can't have that!

The 'don't-want-tos' are the most difficult group to reach. They enjoy their lives and are self-satisfied, they don't want to change the way they think or what they do. They just don't want to. Some may actually believe in God on some intellectual level, but they don't want to live His way, and they certainly don't intend to obey Him, unless, of course, they happen to agree on a particular point. They don't like Christians and they don't love God. They just don't want any part of it all.

Lord, my Father, I ask that You continue to reveal Yourself to those who don't want any part of You. I pray that the Holy Spirit will touch them in the deep and secret places of their spirits, and that these people will see the truth and let You in. If they do not let You in, Lord, then they are lost and I pray for their families and all those they influenced, that Your truth might be revealed to them. In Jesus' precious name I pray. Amen and Amen.

Turned Off: Another group who steadfastly refuses to give themselves to Christ, and who are closely akin to, although not the same as, the 'don't-want-tos,' are the 'turned-off' crowd. Now, this group is perhaps the most self-righteous of all because they once (and probably for a period of time) attended church and were a part of the Christian community, but were 'turned-off' by bad experiences, usually in church, and usually, although not always, in their childhood.

These past unpleasant experiences came from a variety of sources: over-bearing parents, or pastor; a church that emphasizes criticism and all the "don'ts" of life; being the recipient of rigid and harsh judgments; not being loved by family, or pastor, or church congregation. A common thread running through the 'turned-off' group is a hatred of legalism. Unfortunately, the church can be a powerful dispenser of legalism, which comes in many forms: you must go to church three times a week; you must speak Christianese (if you've ever heard this distinctive language, you know what I mean); you must read only this or that version of the Bible; you must not drink, smoke, dance, have too much fun, gamble, divorce, question the Bible or any tenant of the faith; you must (or must not) speak in tongues; you must (or must not) believe in miraculous healing; you must (or must not)

read from a certain prayer book; you must go to confession; you must not go to confession; you must be in a prayer group; you must read the Bible daily; you must not associate with...well, a whole bunch of different types of people. And, the list goes on and on.

Legalism has hurt countless people since the first church in Antioch, which was pastored by Paul and Barnabas. It is interesting that the issue of legalism was the first major issue to be brought before the church council in Jerusalem. Peter and the other Apostles dealt with that problem quickly by declaring that new Gentile-Christians (non-Jews) did not have to be circumcised or follow the laws of Moses. Peter, Paul, and the other Apostles knew even then that a person comes to God and is saved by faith, through the grace of our Lord.⁷⁴

Legalism still flourishes today, however, and is responsible for driving countless seeking souls from God. Legalism is adding to God's word; improving upon the requirements of God and the Scriptures; adding man's self-described superior knowledge, intellect, and understanding to the requirements of the faith. Legalism is humanism in its ugliest form. It assumes that God somehow left out some very important requirements for entering the kingdom of heaven, and that we humans will help Him out of this obvious oversight by filling in the necessary rules. Legalism is hateful and exclusive; it requires that you agree with me, instead of agreeing with God. It seeks to divide and exclude, and it seeks superiority, and, yes, even worship.

Many of this 'turned-off' group today were the children of yesterday who were preached to about their many inadequacies and lack of moral stature. Parents, pastors, and teachers alike — well meaning as they might have been — have often turned the hearts of young people away from organized religion and God by systematically reducing a child's otherwise healthy self-image to ashes. One method of doing this, among many, is to pound away at a teenager until it is clear that he or she is wrong, sinful, and evil for the feelings he or she has. Young people (or any of us, really) can't just stop feeling the feelings they have. Finally, out of self-preservation, people reject the messenger and the message, too.

Young people (and the rest of us, too) are also driven away from organized religion by the "religious" who see evil in virtually all forms of fun and every facet of life. Kids grow up convinced that Christianity is excruciatingly boring, fit only for the very old.

Now, the 'tuned-off' group often has a fair understanding of the Christian faith, and they have often studied the Bible. Many with whom I have spoken are very much convinced of the existence of God, they're just not so sure they like Him, or want to buy in

1. The following passages speak clearly to salvation coming ONLY through the grace of Jesus: Jn 14:6; Acts 10:43; & 3:38-39; Rom 3:21-26; Eph 2:8-9; 1 Tim 4:10; Heb 10:2-14; & 11:6.

to all the perceived rules. They are sure, however, that they don't like the "church people," as they are referred to. The "church people" are the dispensers of rules and judgments; the good people who do no wrong.

The 'turned-off' are not agnostic, or atheist by any means. They are by and large believers in God, but cannot seem to be reconciled with Him. They are tortured to a small degree, or to a large degree. They are not at peace. They are very weary of those who proclaim a belief in Christ. Why, because they have seen so many false proclaimers, and blatant inconsistencies among those who loudly announce their faith (and goodness, of course) in a public manner, and then go on to act in a manner contradictory to their proclamations.

For these people, I want to offer a deeply religious and philosophical suggestion: GET OVER IT!! You are an adult now. You should be able to recognize that Christians are not perfect, but they can still be Christians. You know that you are not perfect, and you expect God to accept you; you should be as forthcoming with those who have hurt you. You should be able to discern the truth of Scripture and the perfection of Jesus. You should know by now that the place for those of us who are imperfect and sinners is in church, where God can minister to us and teach us. Does it make sense to forego Christianity and lose your eternal life, all because of those bad experiences years ago? Down deep, you really do know the truth. Now it's time to do something about it. Come back to the Lord. Worship in His house. Give yourself to Him. Don't worry about the "religious." The Bible will guide, direct, and, when necessary, chastise you. Remember this, too: There is another group of people in the church that you haven't mentioned: loving, godly, committed Christians who are just waiting to love you; humble people who are too aware of their own inadequacies to worry about yours. And, they happen to out number the other group by a large margin.

Heavenly Father, I especially understand those who are 'turned-off' by religion, and I ask Your special blessings for them. Bring them, Lord, to maturity; help them to not judge You by those of us who don't reflect Your loving spirit. Send the Holy Spirit to them and convict them deep within their spirits that You are God, and that You loved them so much that You were tortured for them, and died for them. Help these hurting souls, Lord, to understand that You are not about religion (that's man-made), You are about truth and love, and a relationship with the one God, who created all that was created. In Jesus' precious name I pray. Amen and Amen.

Deceived Christianizers: Yet another group that resolutely avoids a deep commitment to Christ is the Deceived Christianizers. This is a complicated group, and it is

quite easy to miss them altogether. You see, the Deceived Christianizers go to church regularly. They speak the language of the religious, and they go through all the various forms of public worship, just like they were taught: attend church, become baptized, go through confirmation, read from the prayer book, pray in a group, go to formal confession, attend prayer meetings, join committees, attend Sunday School, take communion, have a church wedding, teach a Sunday School class, serve on the governing board, attend home Bible studies, and all the rest. They grew up doing these things, all of which are good things to do, because that's all they have ever known. Somewhere along the way this group of churchgoers came to believe that their salvation became assured as a result of doing these things. All their lives have been an example of walking with Christ; doing the things they should be doing and avoiding all the rest. They don't remember not attending church regularly, missing a sermon, or a Sunday school social. Their actions represent their lives. It's the doing that counts. The Deceived Christianizers are fully engaged in a lifestyle that fosters and engenders religious activity and religious speech. This lifestyle becomes so ingrained that it finally becomes comfortable, and then commonplace.

Now, this group of people would be horrified if you were to suggest that their spiritual life, or commitment to Christ is perhaps lacking. They would immediately turn on you and with great loquaciousness, begin offering proof of their commitment, which, of course, is found in their never-ending list of religious activities. It rarely occurs to this group that they could have simply missed the mark, or the point of the whole religious experience: submitting to Christ, with a broken heart and humble spirit. Really giving yourself to Him.

The Deceived Christianizers have been at this religious thing so long that they sort of forgot what it's all about. The worship experience and all the various ways of being of service to one's church and community somehow got lost in the activity of doing. It all becomes so commonplace, so rote, and so ordinary.

It is my impression that this particular group of people comprises a large percentage of the average congregation. This is what we've come to in the twenty-first century church. The fire is largely out. The rote activity is in. The Deceived Christianizers become deceived by their activities and good deeds, as mankind has always done. At our base level, the human race wants to control everything and take credit for all the good that comes from our activity. Perhaps the biggest enemy of mankind is the deep desire to earn our own salvation by our good deeds.⁷⁵ The evil one, Satan, preys on this weakness with great success. This primal desire to earn our own salvation is closely associated with unabashed humanism, which then feeds the fierce religious activity described above. Surely the more we do the better we are.

These people are very difficult to reach - ask any pastor. They believe they are believers and will not tolerate discussion to the contrary. And perhaps they are believers,

2. No one can earn his own salvation, regardless of his good works. Jn 14:6.

but only in an intellectual sense. Many evangelical churches are so concerned about this phenomenon that they have regular revivals to renew and regenerate the tired spirits of the churchgoers. We humans can take anything for granted - even Christ Jesus, Himself. But there is hope. There is always hope, as long as Christ is in charge.

Father in Heaven, please send the Holy Spirit to those who are caught up in the practice of religion, while missing the object of our faith. Father, we don't need any more religion, we need Jesus in our lives, and in our activities, and in our hearts. Only You can break through the deception that darkens the spirits of those who are bound by the practice of religion to the exclusion of living the faith. Please send the Holy Spirit to those who need you so desperately. Open their hearts to understand; open their eyes to see Your truth. Save them, Father. In Jesus' precious name I pray. Amen and Amen.

Deep Sin: And then there are those tortured souls who have sinned so grievously that they are convinced that God has completely rejected them. Their hurt is so deep that they cannot bare to face themselves with the truth of their lives, not to speak of facing the God-creator of the universe. Inside they moan and grieve over lost opportunity, lost relationships, plans gone wrong, and sins committed. They, like all of us, want so desperately to be loved; to be accepted. To all those who suffer under the burden of sin, Jesus has written you a personal letter...

My Dear Child:

Sin! Is that your problem? Is that why you don't surrender to me? If your friends, co-workers and family knew all about you — what you have done in private — they would lose all respect and admiration for you. Some might even be sickened and shun you, or denounce any relationship with you. This is your fear, isn't it?

You hate it, but you have a secret life, and it's different from your public life. You have hateful, or hurtful thoughts — sometimes licentious and full of lust. Sometimes you want to destroy the reputation of another. You often use people to further your own agenda. You'll lie, too, if necessary. But, you won't tolerate others lying to you. Matter of fact, you have a double standard — one for you, and one (much more demanding) for others. Oh, you don't admit this to yourself, do you? Too uncomfortable. You have to be right, even

righteous. That requires, of course, that others are wrong — off base, stupid, immature, naive, inexperienced, unaware. You rob the dignity of others at times, don't you. You think you can suck the dignity out of others and use it for your own; take the self-respect from others and use it for yourself. All this instead of asking Me for these things, which I would give freely.

You don't steal anything, at least not in a long time. You have just about everything you need. Except, of course, the self-respect and dignity you so thirst for. It's the sin. It just won't go away. You admit that you have a problem with a burning desire for a job and house like your friends at church have. Wouldn't mind having his wife, too. He has it made and doesn't work nearly as hard as you do. It's not fair — he's had everything handed to him. Think of the people you could impress with a house like that.

You've had a couple of affairs, but they didn't mean anything — according to your reasoning. Sex has always been a big part of your life, but no one knows about that. If people only knew what goes on in your mind; in your secret life. If they knew, all would be lost. You couldn't stand the shame. You'd end up divorced; no relationship with your children or friends. Alone! Alone! You don't want to be alone. But you're full of sin, and you know it.

I've also noticed that you can't seem to get rid of the hate you have for your brother-in-law, not to speak of your boss at work. You've been dishonest there, too, but no one knows about that. You have damaged the reputation of your company and your boss many times, and then there was the time you took company property for your own use. You don't give a full workday to your employer either, do you? But, that's his fault — he doesn't deserve it. And if you could only forget the abortion you encouraged and paid for years ago. After all, it was only a conglomeration of cells — not a human being, right?

This is why you don't come to your Savior, isn't it? You think that it's hopeless. You can't be forgiven such sin, so it's easier to reject Me before I reject you. Right? But you hurt so much and you want so much to be clean; to be loved, accepted, and forgiven. But, you're convinced that you cannot be forgiven, it's too late.

You might wonder how I know what is in your heart and spirit. I am He who died for your sins, hanging from a cross. I am He who loves you and wants a close personal relationship with you. Was My sacrifice not sufficient to cover your sins, when it covered all the other sins of mankind? If your sin is too great to be forgiven, then it is greater than I. Do you really believe that your sin is greater than the Lord, God of all creation. Was My death on the cross for you wasted? Did I die for nothing? Did I have nails and a sword driven into My body for nothing? Are you the only one in all of creation who could not be touched by My sacrifice?

I know your heart. I know your sin. And still I love you. Don't you know how much I love you; how much I'm willing to do for you? Please! I want you with Me and My Father for all eternity. Do you know how long eternity is? If you lived 1,000 years for each grain of sand on Earth, not one second of eternity would have yet past. Please come to Me. Will you allow your sin to separate you from Me? This is Satan's desire. Will you do this when I have already paid the price of your sin? This is My gift to you. Please accept it. All you have to do is accept My gift of forgiveness. Don't you see, the price has been paid; the punishment meted out? This, I did for you. For you! If you will receive this gift, I make this promise to you: I will remember your sins no more, and I will put them as far away from me as East is from West. This, I promise. You will then have no shame, and even I will not know of your sins, because I choose to forget them. I love you. Do you love me? Come to Me now and confess your sins. I created you and I want to be with you. I need you. Don't you know that? Why would I create one as precious as you and then die for you, if I didn't want you with Me for all eternity? You say you don't know what to say? I don't require fancy words. Here, I'll help you. Pray with Me...

Heavenly Father, I come before you frightened, sinful and ashamed. I don't have much faith or trust in You, and I have sinned against You so much. Father, please forgive me, cleanse me and take away my shame. Father, I accept the gift of salvation from Your Son, my Lord, Jesus. From this moment on, I give You my life, my heart and my soul. I offer this prayer in the name of Jesus, the Christ, my Savior, my Lord. Amen and Amen.

With All My Love Forever,

Jesus

For those of you who aren't sure if you are forgiven and saved, I offer the following questions for your consideration:

25. Are you a new creation? Have you been born again? Please don't recoil at the phrase "born again." Jesus, Himself, used those words: *"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."* (Jn 3:3) To be born again means to be spiritually born into the kingdom of God. We are spiritually dead until we are born again. How does one become born again? By praying a pray like the one offered above, and by believing that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He died for you and rose again from the dead to sit at the right hand of the Father. But remember, belief is always followed by action. True spiritual belief necessarily causes change in a person's life. Have you changed?
26. Is Jesus your Lord, or is He only your Savior? Scripture makes it clear that Jesus must be your Lord and Savior. You see, it's easy to accept Him as Savior. That requires no action on your part, and no change; no discomfort. It's easy, like joining a club. But to accept Him as Lord — well, that's entirely different! If Christ is Lord, then you are NOT. If Christ is Lord, then it's His word you follow, not your own pre-conceived notions. If Christ is Lord, then you must obey Him. Is Jesus Lord, or are you? Are you willing to submit to Him?
27. Do you think about Him often? Do you think about ways to please Him?
28. Do you accept His word as truth? Or, do you accept only the parts with which you agree, and reject those parts with which you disagree?
29. Do you read His word often? If He is who He says He is, how could you not have a burning interest in what He has to say? Why would you be satisfied with hearsay, or the report of another concerning what the God of the universe has to say? Why would you just go along supposing you know what God is all about; making up your own rules? If there really is a God, and if He created you, and if He has certain requirements to please him and to be saved to eternity with Him, if all of this is true, then how can you possibly justify not studying His written word? How?
30. Do you attend church regularly? Do you enjoy being around other Christians. If not, why not? Be honest with yourself. Is it laziness? Is it ambivalence? Maybe you don't like the atmosphere; the people; the message. Think about that. Oh, I know what you're thinking: You don't have to go to church to be a Christian. You can worship God on the golf course. You know, you're right. You don't have to go to church to be a Christian. But Christians just naturally go to church, just like Jesus did. And you're also right about being able to

worship God on the golf course. But Christians also come together and worship Him formally because it pleases Him, and it provides the opportunity to learn from each other. One more thing: I don't fall for that golf course thing, and neither do you.

31. Is your belief only intellectual in nature, or is it deep, and spiritual, and followed by action? In my opinion (and please check this with your pastor), the belief in Christ required by Scripture is not of an intellectual nature: to be pondered, weighed, and then finally decided upon — all this being of the mind, and not of the spirit. No! It is a belief resulting in action. Real belief is always followed by action. For example, if you believe that the chair is solid, you will sit in it. If you believe in Christ Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you will take action on that belief. Such a belief will change you forever. Have you taken action on your belief?

32. When you sin, and you will, are you convicted of it? Does it hurt? Do you feel the hurt you have caused God?

These are questions for you to deeply consider. Only you know the answers. Don't let this moment pass without giving your life to Christ. He is asking for you now. There may be no other opportunity to make this decision. Your sin may be much worse than that described above or perhaps much less. It makes no difference; one sin separates you from God, and all have sinned according to Scripture. Jesus is our only bridge from the Place of Separation to the dwelling place of God. Anyone can use the bridge of Christ, if he or she accepts Him as the bridge — the Lord and the Savior of all. Pray to Him now!

The Beginning