

1997

Dear Friends,

As a minister I have had the privilege of sanctioning the exchange of marriage vows for a growing number of couples. Such a privilege has also brought with it the responsibility for me to counsel those contemplating marriage. As I have sought to fulfill that responsibility I have grown in my appreciation for the importance of compatibility in a marriage. There simply must be sufficient fundamental interests and fairly equal capacities shared by a couple if they are to live together in happy and holy intimacy.

While most of us understand the importance of compatibility in a marriage, I wonder how often we reflect on some of the implications of its importance for the marriage of Christ and His Church. We could hardly conceive of beings more incompatible than the holy God and a sinful people. Yet, divine grace changes that incompatibility. The redemption of God in Christ does not simply change our status, it changes our souls. The justifying imputation of Christ's righteousness accomplishes the former; the sanctifying impartation of that righteousness over the course of a lifetime achieves the latter. We who are in the midst of the sometimes perplexing and often hard process of sanctification do well to contemplate the final result of the process. We see better in the light of that end all that we find ourselves obliged to endure now.

While it is true that Christ is central to all Scripture, it does not follow that Christ is the central focus of all Scripture. There are significant passages of the Word of God where the people of God are of proximate concern, with Christ being ever of ultimate concern. Many of those passages show the covenant people in unattractive colors.

Israel's trek from Egypt to Canaan, as well as Israel's history in the days of the judges and, later, during the divided monarchy, all offer historical accounts which present a sweeping picture of an ungrateful and unfaithful people. In the early Church, too, there were defections (Demas) and disagreements (Peter and Paul, cf., Galatians). Such passages could well make us wonder whether any compatibility between Christ and His people has been or ever will be produced.

Then we turn to those passages which show the Church, not in the humiliation of her earthly struggles, but in the beauty of her Savior's grace, love, and perfected glory. Such glimpses are found, for example, in the Song of Solomon and in the latter chapters of the Revelation. Those closing chapters of Revelation give us a vision of the glorified Church to correspond with the vision of the glorified Christ found in the first chapter. A comparison of those visions shows just how compatible Christ and His bride finally become. This is the light which sheds understanding on all that we endure throughout our earthly pilgrimage.

The fundamental thing which is ever and always happening to God's redeemed people is that they are, by divine grace, wisdom, love and power, being made worthy of the loving respect and holy intimacy of the Son of God. Such love is a love of complacency, as distinct from a love of condescension. It is one thing for Christ to condescend to love poor sinners; it is quite another thing for Him to marry a holy, beautiful bride. The process of sanctification makes us such that Christ loves us not in spite of what we are, but because of what we have become.

The end result of this sanctifying work of the Lord will more than vindicate the divine

wisdom, love, and power--all of which we may question during the painful and perplexing course of our lives. We all at times ask why God allows some affliction in our lives, or withholds some object or relationship from us. Indeed, when the Lord is most sanctifyingly at work in our hearts we can frequently be least conscious of it and most painfully confused about it.

Recall how Job, amidst his trials, was full of questions and doubts about God's wisdom, love, and power. When the Lord appeared to Job, the manifested glory of the Almighty was sufficient to quell all of Job's questions. The righteous sufferer then asked no questions of God because in his vision of God he saw the answer. Our hearts and minds will be even more satisfied when we see not only the glory of our triune God, but also the glorious handiwork of the Lord in our own perfected lives. When we behold the beauty and glory of what God has made of us, we shall marvel, not that the process was so long and hard, but that it was so short, the afflictions so light, the burdens so easy for us to bear. The glimpses of this certainty, which God has given us in His Word, should shine a guiding light and convey sustaining power for us amidst the darkest valleys of our walk to our wedding to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Yours in glorious anticipation,
William Harrell

Dear Friends,

Recently I was asked by several people, who were not members of our church, what new programs we would be offering in the new year. The answer I gave and continue to give is that we do not plan to change programs but people.

It is natural that we--being creatures of time and subject throughout our lives to varying circumstances, including the growth and development of ourselves and those around us--should accept change as an essential and, indeed, the invariable part of our lives.

However, change need not always be good. If we are pursuing a wrong course, or pursuing a right course in a wrong way, or if we have completed a provisional course, change is the legitimate order. In such cases, the adoption of new courses and methods is essential for progress. But then, as we all have experienced, there is the change of regression, wherein we slip from or forsake a legitimate course for one that is not. Thus, there are right and wrong changes we can make.

I believe it to be a facile assumption that too many believers make when they think variety to be the spice, if not the whole meal, of the Christian life. In our day, with its prevalent existential philosophy, people have a value system of vices and virtues quite different from the systems of previous generations. For example, the preoccupation with novel things used to be considered childish, while one's settling into the harness of bearing responsibilities signified a virtuous maturity. Today, the one so settled is considered to be complacently in a rut, while the searchers for novelty are extolled as adventurous explorers who will prove to be saviors of the future.

Perhaps what helps fuel the spirit which exalts the novel is that we are drawing to the close of one millennium and the dawning of a new one. It may be significant, and certainly is interesting, to note that as the last millennium drew to its close, men entertained a very grim view of the world. Indeed, they thought that the world would expire with their millennium. Thus, long-term commitments were avoided as were projects requiring constancy and perseverance. Yet when the world did not end with the coming of the year 1000, men began to shift their thinking to embrace the notion of permanence. Thus, for example, one finds that there was an explosion of cathedral building after the year 1000. The proliferation of such vast buildings was due not solely to advancement in architectural techniques, but, rather, such architectural advances were the fruit of a great philosophical shift from men's preoccupation with the transient to their acceptance of at least some degree of permanence.

Be that as it may, we are not interested in erecting cathedrals of stone either in this millennium or the next. But we are committed to building up the living stones of the body of Christ, which building will endure through time and eternity. How is that best to be done? Are novel methods of ministry essential to our reaching a generation obsessed with novelty? I think not. I do not see Paul charging pastors such as Timothy to preach the whole counsel of God until such time as people refuse to respond to anything other than special and perpetually changing programs. In fact, the apostle charges pastors to preach the Word in season and out of season (2 Tim. 4:1-5). Faithful pastors are to remain constant, even and especially in days of great excitability and change.

In our course of commitment to a systematic exposition of the whole counsel of God, we have experienced how the Word presents its own engaging variations. As we have surveyed the action of the historical books, the explicit doctrinal teaching of the epistles,

the wisdom literature, poetry, and so forth, we have found ourselves far from being in a tiresome rut. There is pleasing arrangement of variation in the revelation of God sufficient to satisfy every legitimate spiritual need and appetite. Nor do we find a familiarity which breeds contempt setting in when we make repeated excursions through books of the Bible. We are now well into our second course of systematic exposition of the whole Bible, and while there is a blessed familiarity this second time round, there is also a freshness as though we were making new discoveries. The discoveries we are making are the greater depths and unfathomable riches which we, due to our previously more limited spiritual capacities, had earlier passed over.

We all can feel the need for changes. However, if we feel a need to change from a steady diet of the Word of God, we are sensing something which represents regression, not progress. Such desire for change must be resisted. We must remind ourselves that when we begin to think that we have fathomed the revelation of the infinite and eternal God, and that we must press on from such a revelation to newer things, we are simply wrong. How can finite and fallible creatures ever fathom such a divine revelation which will outlast heaven and earth?

We never are in need of a change from the Word; we ever are in need to be ourselves changed by the Word. We are constantly in need of having our minds transformed and our hearts purified by a faithful ministry of the Word and sacraments of God--simple, ancient, and perfect means to change imperfect sinners into the likeness of God.

Yours in the renewing constancy of Christ,

William Harrell

Dear Friends,

This month, with kind permission from the author, I am reproducing an excellent letter written by Carl Durham, pastor of Sovereign Redeemer Fellowship (OPC) in Boise, Idaho. The valuable content of the letter is self-evident. Yet it is interesting and instructive for us all to note a train of spiritual influence in Carl's life from his own godly parents, then through the ministries of William Still in Aberdeen, Scotland, and of myself here at Immanuel, where Carl completed his internship. I am certain that I, as an elder brother to Carl, speak for his natural and spiritual father, as well as for the spiritual father figures who have touched his life, when I say how greatly I rejoice to see the excellent fruit evident in the following letter and increasing in Carl's ministry. We simply never know who will take up our teaching and example and carry them to higher perfection. I am delighted that someone such as Carl has done so with what he has been taught, as is clear in his letter:

Dear Friends,

It has been very encouraging of late in our evening worship services to see the compassion of Jesus demonstrated towards the pagan woman who comes to plead for her daughter's exorcism. Jesus valued the woman's faith because it was vigorous enough to embrace her daughter's spiritual deliverance, saying "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." (Matthew 15:28)

There was a unity in this woman's mind between her plea of faith and her child's spiritual condition; when she asks for mercy for her child, she actually asks it for herself: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David. My daughter is severely demon-possessed." (Mt. 15:22) Thus this Canaanite has a conception of faith as intergenerational, linking Divine mercy shown towards a parent with Divine mercy shown towards her offspring.

In this unity of faith between parent and holy seed, this Canaanite woman stands in the tradition of another Gentile in Matthew's Gospel who was commended as having "greater faith than any in Israel." (Matt.8:10) The centurion's faith prompted Jesus to marvel because it extended beyond a mere individual's belief in the power of God to a quiet certainty that if Jesus just "said the word" (Matt.8:8) then the servant-boy would be healed. His was a confident expectation that the prayers of the head of the household could effect the very survival of the sick child entrusted to his care.

Now, it challenges me as a parent to realize that both these Gentiles receive praise from Christ not merely for their saving faith as adults but also for their faith for the welfare of their covenant children. It was the verbalized, heartfelt faith of parents for children that most moved Jesus to marvel. Is it that way for me? Do I cultivate a spirit of faith for my own offspring or do I spend most of my time thinking only of my own spiritual welfare? Do I verbalize a faith on my children's behalf in prayer with something of the urgency of these Gentiles in the Gospels? Am I able to say that, to some small degree, I have obeyed the injunction of Lamentations 2:19 to "lift my hands for the life of my children?"

It is impressive to see the vigor of faith that God has worked into this Canaanite woman on behalf of her child. She continues in heart-cries for her child even when Jesus is initially silent and the disciples are irritated by her presence. (Matt.15:23) She comes to fall at Jesus' feet in worship even after being told of her lowly alien status outside the covenant nation of Israel. She is willing even to take the common designation given to the heathen by the Jews, "dogs," as true of herself, if only the mercy of the "master" of

the table, God, can fall down as crumbs for her child's welfare.

Now, I know this exchange between Jesus and this woman may leave you with some unanswered questions. (There is a tape of the sermon on this passage available from 1/12/97 that could help you further.) But note how biblical faith will extend itself on the slenderest of hopes, as long as the hope is placed before it by God. Mark 7:27 brings out most clearly the slender ray of hope on which this Canaanite woman placed all the weight of her faith. What does Jesus say to this woman? "Let the children be filled first." That is, "Let the covenant people of Israel be the first ones to experience my saving power." Ah, but that word "first" meant that there could be someone second in line! In the Palestinian home, the only napkins to wipe one's mouth and plate were soft pieces of bread. Scholars tell us that these pieces of bread would be used to clean up after eating and then tossed to the dogs. This woman was willing by faith to take the lowliest place at God the Father's table. "Make me a dog," she says, "as long as I and my daughter can have you, Lord Jesus, as our master."

Of course, this was the kind of answer that Jesus was looking for. His all-knowing power knew how to test this woman's faith to the proper extent - and no further - to bring such a word of absolute dependence out of her mouth. For, by her words of faith, flowing from her heart in which the Spirit had worked, she would be justified. (Matthew 12:37)

We are within the covenant family now, and not relegated to the lowly place of dogs under the table, as this woman was until the Gospel should be brought to the Gentile world after the Resurrection of Christ. Should we not then expect God in Christ to do even greater things for our next generation? May God give us words for our children's and grand-children's spiritual welfare to bring before Him in prayer. May He also give us perseverance to keep asking for their deliverance until Jesus says, "Let it be as you desire."

Nor should such expectations be limited to our flesh and blood. I recently heard from one of the older saints at my seminary church in Scotland telling me of the joy of being a "praying grand-mother" for a young man whose father studied for the ministry there 20 years ago. Now at the University of Georgia, this college student still writes back to Scotland to this dear woman who has prayed specifically for him these many years. Who can say what this union of faith over generations will mean for this young man's future?

Yours in Hope,

Carl Durham

And yours with a sense of deep privilege,

William Harrell

Dear Friends,

I begin this month's letter by expressing my gratitude for the many whose financial gifts and especially prayers made our recent trip to Scotland not only possible, but also quite fruitful. The trip was different from all previous ones in a number of ways. I believe it will be not only of interest to you, but also edifying, if I report in this letter something of my observations and opinions relative to the visit.

Our determination to go to Scotland was this time prompted by a desire to see, above all, our dear friend, William Still, who had since January become incapacitated for the ministry. It was decided, after our having consulted with a number of folk close to Mr. Still in Aberdeen, that such a visit might prove beneficial to him.

Thus, resources were quickly gathered and arrangements made for the trip. We left for Scotland not knowing quite what we would find or experience upon our arrival. All we knew was that, unlike the many previous visits to Gilcomston South Church in Aberdeen, this one would be without William Still ministering from the pulpit. Nor did we know the condition in which we would find the church, the people having been without the ministry of their beloved pastor for several months, with dim prospects of his returning to pastor them.

Within an hour of our arrival I visited Mr. Still. He had, indeed, become frail, and it was apparent to me that he would most likely never recover sufficiently to return to his ministerial labors again. But while the sore realization sank into me that my beloved friend and spiritual mentor had almost certainly reached the end of his public labors for the Lord, a deeper and more enduring sense of sweetness came over me as I sat with this dear servant of God. Feelings of gratitude and privilege welled up afresh in me as I found myself once again in the presence of the man whose prodigious and powerful sermons had challenged, comforted, and fed my soul, whose wise and loving counsel had guided me over the years, whose prayers had upheld me, whose example had inspired me, and whose friendship had enriched me to incalculable degree. I had come, thinking I would bless my infirm friend, and I found that even in his diminished state he was blessing me. Subsequent daily visits only multiplied our mutual blessing.

The day came for us to say what surely would be our last farewell this side of glory. The pain and sense of loss was indescribable; yet the sense of sweet privilege was exquisite, all of it being but a prelude to what we and many others will experience when the Lord calls Mr. Still out of this world into His nearer presence. The pain of such separation is deep, but the overarching gratitude for how the Lord has knit us together in Himself, along with the victorious expectation of a more perfect and never ending reunion in His glory are deeper, higher, broader, stronger.

As for our many dear brethren in Gilcomston, any concerns we may have had for their welfare and future were resoundingly answered at the first prayer meeting we attended. The singing was as reverently jubilant and the prayers as passionate and zealous as ever. Familiar friends were carrying on, faithfully serving with increased, not diminished,

vigor. To them were added many new and excellent souls, young and older, who blended into the body wonderfully. The members of Gilcomston, while they remain human and imperfect, are nevertheless spiritually robust and committed to the Lord. They may not know in detail what lies before them, but they do know and trust the Lord who is sustaining them. Thus they appear to be rightly confident that the God who graciously and richly blessed them for so long through Mr. Still, will continue to tend and care for them during the pulpit vacancy and in the calling of a new pastor. I could not help feeling that they have expectation of an Elisha to follow their Elijah. Some such continuation of blessing for them I, too, fully expect.

During our visit, the retirement of Mr. Still, to be effective on 8 May, his 86th birthday, was officially announced. That made it certain that, except for Mr. Still's planned farewell address to his Presbytery and a farewell sermon to be given in Gilcomston, an era of public ministry by one of the most godly ministers ever to have lived had been completed.

William Still has fought the good fight and has finished his race of public service. It will take succeeding generations to gain truer perspective so as to assess the massive contribution he has made to Gilcomston and to the Church throughout Scotland and the world. However, it is even now clear to me that the capacity Mr. Still yet has to bless--aged, frail, and fading from this life though he be--and the capacity his people have demonstrated to go from strength to strength, issue from a single source, namely, the Lord Jesus. It is because William Still has preached not himself, but Christ, and it is because the people, while being affectionately appreciative of the Lord's servant, have devoted themselves to worshipping and lovingly serving the Lord Himself, that this pastor and his people are living examples of the thruth that to live is Christ, to die is gain. May we learn from and profitably imitate them in this.

Soberly and gratefully yours,

William Harrell

Dear Friends,

It is a too common observation amongst ministers that when the Word of God is read to their congregations during Lord's Day worship, the people largely appear bored, confused, disinterested, even resentful, with few showing a lively interest. The question, then, is: What can be done to change this phenomenon, so that people give vital and reverent attention to the public reading of the Scriptures?

Our identifying the problem accurately is where we must start. Hardly anyone who gives serious attention to this matter will say that the problem is with the Word of God. A large part of the problem is that it is the hearers of Scripture who have become dulled by their having imbibed a steady diet of television, videos, and films. Doubtless, such things have had detrimental effect on most people. Not only does the content of these visual arts tend to dull the moral senses, but the formatting of them--with vivid and spectacular images and scenes shifting rapidly--tends to weaken powers of observation, analysis, and application.

Solutions which are usually suggested and attempted seem to me to be inadequate and unbalanced. For example, many try to change the reading of Scripture in order to appeal to our too visually oriented society. Thus we find in certain churches a rota of persons other than the minister doing the reading, or Scripture reading augmented by the playing of music and even the projecting of slides with fitting scenes, or little skits to act out the reading, and so forth.

The problem with such gimmicks is that they serve further to dull people's powers of hearing the Word read to them. By ministers adopting some of the techniques of the visual arts, people in the pews will be intrigued by the novelty but not engaged in the Scriptures. And such intrigue will last only so long as the endeavors are novel, for in most instances the techniques employed but poorly ape what people can get in a much more polished and professional way from television, videos, and films.

Then there are those who tell their people not to watch films, videos and television. While it is true that on the whole much good would be gained by most people were they so to abstain from such things, this is really an unrealistic counsel (although, it is interesting to note that Bette Midler, herself an actress, says she refuses to let her child watch television). Most people simply will not give up their televisions, films and videos, nor need they do so, if they use them judiciously.

What we all need to realize is that the watching of a visual presentation and the hearing of audible reading are two different disciplines, with the hearing being, perhaps surprisingly, a more active discipline than the watching. It is not, as is commonly supposed, that public reading was but a poor form of communication which has now been rendered obsolete by the advent of television. Those trying to mix these two disciplines do so to the detriment of both.

Therefore, people may safely observe their visual arts, but they must also be encouraged not to neglect the fine and edifying art of listening to audible reading. Such encouragement will direct people to read themselves aloud regularly, something which certainly should be done by heads of households in their leading of family devotions. Yet such reading should not be confined to devotions or to the Bible. There are worlds of entertaining and instructive lessons to be learned through what John Bunyan referred to as the ear gate to the soul.

As to the reading of the Word, ministers should not content themselves with laying all blame for inattentive hearers on the hearers. I am persuaded that people, even though they may initially respond to gimmicks, are famished, perhaps beyond the point of feeling their hunger, for the sort of reading of God's Word which we find expressed in the answer to our *Larger Catechism* question 157, which asks: "How is the Word of God to be read?" Answer: "The holy Scriptures are to be read with an high and reverent esteem of them; with a firm persuasion that they are the very Word of God, and that He only can enable us to understand them; with desire to know, believe, and obey the will of God revealed in them; with diligence, and attention to the matter and scope of them; with meditation, application, self-denial, and prayer."

Some will say that it matters not how poorly the Word is read, so long as the Word is read. They will point to cases such as Jonathan Edwards, who read both Scripture and his sermons in a thin-voiced monotone, and yet God used him mightily in the great revival. That is true. It is also true that when Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal, God answered his prayer with fire from heaven which consumed the offering, the wet wood and stones and the very dust. But such were extraordinary days. Ministers in any day dare not be indifferent to how they read God's Word to their congregations. If they are poor readers, they should work to improve. They should articulate clearly, project with sufficient volume, and vary their cadence and pitch appropriately. Gratitude, reverence, and joy should harmonize in their tone. Then, when they read the holy Word of God, whether people listen or not, the people will know that God has spoken to them through a faithful servant of the prophets, apostles, and Lord Himself.

There is much work for both pulpit and pew to do in our day, so far as the public reading and hearing of the Scriptures is concerned. That work consists not in our adding to or taking away from such reading, but in our study and practice to read and to listen to the Word of God as the unique, infinitely precious, and redeemingly powerful treasure from God that it is.

Faithfully yours,

William Harrell

Dear Friends,

Patience is possibly one of the most rare of virtues. Why is it that what may be called the art of one's doing nothing at the right time should be so infrequently practiced? There are many factors which conspire to make it so.

The desire for immediate gratification is strong in us all. It manifests itself in the earliest years of our lives, and can maintain a strong hold on us into old age. None of us, but especially no one who is young, welcomes the notion of waiting for something we want. Every day--every moment--which passes without our having the object of our desire, can seem to us as a punishment which we can throw off by our own resolute action to obtain our desire. When we are in such a determined and demanding state, patience seems like an ineffectual waste of time which serves only to prolong the agony of our being without what we want.

This impulse for immediate gratification can only be quelled when we seek our gratification from our true and lasting portion, namely, the Lord Himself. Only when we rejoice in the Lord as our portion (Ps. 16:5,6) and exult in the love of God in Christ, from which nothing can separate us (Rom. 8:35-39), can we experience that contentment with our lot and trust in our Lord from which the exercise of patience can spring and be sustained.

We also no doubt find it difficult to have and to exercise patience because it is one virtue which suffers being counterfeited perhaps more than others. Those practicing patience are frequently thought to be guilty of apathy. They are seen not to be acting, and hence they are thought not to be caring. The patient may also be considered indolent, their inactivity resulting from a lazy lack of energy. Additionally, patient souls may suffer being charged with procrastination or with cowardly paralysis. Observers who attribute one or more of these vices to the virtue of patience can serve to bring additional pressure upon those practicing patience. The patient ones are pressured to abandon their virtuous practice in favor of a course of action which may silence their earthly critics, but do so at the expense of the approbation of their heavenly Father.

Even eminently godly souls have been charged with one or more of these counterfeits as they were practicing a course of patience ordained by God. Esther awaited the divine initiative, during the course of which many, perhaps even her godly uncle, Mordecai, were in consternation over what appeared to be her procrastination (Esth. 4:13-7:10). Our Lord Jesus slept in the storm-tossed boat while His disciples charged Him with apathy: "*Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?*" (Mk. 4:38). Indeed, our Lord's patience was misconstrued by all--even His own disciples--at the cross. Mockers challenged Him to action: "*He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we shall believe in Him.*" (Mt. 27:42). We must not be surprised when our own exercise of godly patience is similarly misconstrued.

Patience is vindicated not by changing itself into action, but by staying its course until it receives that fruit and reward which only can be had by one's waiting in trusting expectation. For true patience is more than inactivity. It is a productive refusal to intrude one's own efforts into a process which calls for a humble and prayerful waiting upon the working of God. Patience is thus productive waiting. In patience we hold fast until we see the true course and signal for action. During such waiting, God is at work for us, around us, and in us, planting seeds, producing fruit and causing its fermentation in a way in which our feeble and blind efforts could never do.

The great Puritan, Jeremiah Burroughs, preached a series of sermons and published them under the title, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*. No less rare and no less precious is the related jewel of Christian patience. It should sober and convict us when we realize how much fruit of godliness and how many valuable blessings we have gone without due to our failure to have and use the rare jewel of patience. In the world, we have not because we work not. In the kingdom of God's grace, we often have not because we wait not. May we learn better the art of doing at the right times nothing except trusting the Lord, praying, and waiting with expectation for the precious fruit surely to come.

Patiently yours,

William Harrell

Dear Friends,

I would like to describe to you an experience which is painful, perplexing, and not as common as it should be. The experience is that of a believer who finds himself experiencing growth in godly virtues, growth in fruitful usefulness in the kingdom of God, yet, at the same time, growth in the ensnaring and corrupting power of sin in his life. Such a believer may be a church officer, a pastor, a missionary, or a Sunday school teacher. He may be in a position of prominent leadership, or he may bear some less visible responsibility in the Church. Whatever his gifts and calling may be, he finds that he is being used increasingly by the Lord for the good of His people. However, he likewise experiences increasingly frequent and intense episodes of wrestling with and falling into besetting sin.

What must those persons think and feel who experiences such things at the same time? It surely is not unusual for them to feel that they are hypocrites, whose mask of piety will at any time be torn off, revealing the essential vileness of their hearts. A believer in such a situation comes dreads exposure. He recoils at the thought of his sinful thoughts and undetected sinful deeds coming to light, and so producing shock, amazement, and scandal amongst his brethren. Yet the fact that his sins remain undetected brings him no comfort. He fearfully reasons that his may be the worst of cases, namely, that he will be allowed to proceed through his life presenting an image of godliness to the world, only to be exposed in the final day, when there will be no time or allowance for chastisement and repentance, only a just and irrevocable divine condemnation.

Even the manifestly blessed service of such a one can become to him not only a source of wonder, but also of anguish. For he reasons that he himself, who has been given so much from the Lord, will be judged more strictly by the Lord for his failure personally and vitally to apply the power which worked through him to bring light and godly victory to others.

Courses for relief present themselves to such a poor soul. He thinks of confessing his sin to a godly confidant, asking for prayer and helpful counsel. If he holds office in the Church, he thinks of resigning in order to concentrate on the chaotic affairs of his own soul. But while he considers these and similar courses, he carries on from day to day, being an instrument of blessing to others while to himself he is a loathsome, accursed being.

What I have described may appear to be the throes of the hypocrite. But, on closer and more objective inspection such experience proves to be that of a committed believer in a spiritual battle. He has in truth made progress in godliness. He has indeed been used to bring the blessing of Christ to others. Satan has noted this and determines to put a stop to such advances against his dark, death-grip on the hearts and minds of the souls being touched and transformed by the godly man's service. The devil probes the saint for weaknesses. He finds that neither intimidations nor enticements succeed in staying the godly soldier's spiritual vigor and successful service. Thus, the man's own heart is, as it were, turned against him. Residual sin is stimulated with a frequency and intensity that make the man doubt that he has ever truly been released from the dominion of iniquity and cleansed from the corruption of transgression.

To such experience the Apostle Paul testifies in Romans 7. It is the experience of the

determined soldier of Christ, who reckoning himself to be dead to sin and alive to God, ventures forth effectively for his Lord. But such service raises the ire of the enemy of our souls. Accordingly, Satan does all he can to convince the saint that he is a wretched man, to deceive the child of God into thinking he is an illegitimate pretender, and to persuade the beloved of God that he has been forsaken by his heavenly Father.

What can be done for one in such a state? He can be reminded that though he is a great sinner, Christ died for such. He can review the histories of believers recorded in Scripture to see how terribly some of them had sinned, and yet were not cast off by God. He can, with appropriate discretion and prudence, confide in those more spiritually mature than himself and enlist in general terms the supporting prayers of those less spiritually mature. Finally, he can discipline himself to put on the full armor of God and continue to stand in his course of testing by evil. What such a saint must never do is capitulate in his struggle against sin and Satan. Those in spiritual warfare must know that they shall receive many blows and sustain many wounds. But it is in such warfare that soldiers strike most telling blows for the kingdom of God.

The experience I have described is, I believe, more rare than it ought to be. If it is so, it is most likely because too many who name the name of Christ have retreated from spiritual warfare or never have entered significantly into it. Do such retiring professors of faith really expect to be commended for their lack of scars by the One who was wounded for our transgressions?

Yours in the good fight,

William Harrell

Dear Friends,

On 30 July 1997, the soul of my dear friend and spiritual mentor, William Still, acted in obedience to its last earthly command of our Lord, and departed this life to be perfected and to dwell forever in the nearer presence of the Redeemer. As he had done with countless other divine orders received through fifty-two years of pastoral ministry and even more years of Christian experience, Mr. Still obeyed the command willingly. It is reported by his Session Clerk, William Leslie, who was with him at the close of his earthly pilgrimage, that his last words were, "I want to go home." Seconds after he said that, William Still breathed his last while peacefully and sweetly departing this life for heaven. Thusly did one of the most fruitful servants of Christ, and very likely the most godly of Christians, and certainly the most beloved of pastors of our century, leave this world to enter into the glorious joy of his heavenly Father.

In the loving providence of our Lord and through the loving care of a number of his flock, Mr. Still died in the place he had called home for more than fifty-two years. The Lord's providence for us should also be seen in this. The faithful servant of Christ was at his end in his earthly home--a place those privileged to visit found always to be filled with light, warmth, and beauty. Yet there he expressed his desire to be in his true home. Hence, at his death, as throughout his life, Mr. Still's words serve to direct our hearts and minds heavenward.

The pain of his loss to us is immense. He was unique. We shall not see any like him again in our earthly lives. No longer shall we hear that rich voice singing to God's praise or leading us in prayer to the throne of sovereign grace. No longer shall we behold him in front of the congregation directing the singing of praise to highest endeavor. No longer shall we be transported to visionary heights by his majestically powerful and exquisitely penetrating sermons. No more shall his pen record for us treasures new and old from God's Word. No longer may we call upon him for his wise counsel, finding that he gives it more succinctly than we thought possible, imparting to our dark situations liberating light, and also giving more than we could have asked or thought in his loving, fatherly tenderness.

Yet the privilege which is ours in our having known and profited from this amazing servant of God swallows up our immense pain with immeasurable joy. Our Lord could have treasured up the beauties and virtues of such godly character in a private believer, but it pleased Him to call William Still to serve in a public ministry which was long, rich, and extensive. His legacy to us is his life, given so faithfully, lovingly, and unreservedly for the glory of God and for the good of God's people. He has done for us the greatest service any man could do: he has shown us the living God. By his sharing with us this vision, in all of the glorious fullness and depth in which he himself beheld the Lord, he has given us something which shall never leave or forsake us. We have been awakened from the dead by the clarion call of this servant of Christ, and our minds have been transformed by truth, our hearts enlarged by love, our souls purified and empowered by grace.

My first contact with William Still was audible. In July 1971, I joined some friends listening to one of his sermon tapes. His opening prayer gripped me, convincing me that God was far greater in majesty and mercy than I had imagined. His preaching filled me to overflowing. By April 1972, at the suggestion and by the kind material provision of my own father in the faith, William Fulton, I was sent to Scotland to meet Mr. Still. I arrived in Aberdeen weary from travel, and amidst dark clouds and falling rain, barely in time for the Wednesday night Bible Study. There I first saw Mr. Still, and he appeared to be the most solid and luminous man I had ever seen. By that weekend I was sick with a terrible cold, but I recall with vivid detail the power of his preaching. Thus, as a mere babe in Christ myself, I began to feed on Mr. Still's ministry at the beginning of its second and most mature half. I never stopped the feeding.

The day of his funeral, more than a quarter century later, was nothing like my first day in Aberdeen. I was privileged to join a large congregation of the children of Gilcomston, gathered from far and near to express loving gratitude to God for the gift of this precious minister of His Word. The church building was packed to capacity. The congregational singing of the opening hymn, *Now Thank We All Our God*, was indescribably rich and sweet. Its volume and clarity were remarkable, especially considering that so many of us more than once had our voices crack and our throats swell with emotion, preventing for a time the production of any sound but a groan.

Mr. Still's three closest co-laborers conducted the services at the church and graveside in accordance with his explicit instructions for a simple funeral. George Philip read with consummate sensitivity God's Word, and offered a full and most consoling prayer. James Philip then spoke movingly of the blessing from God which we had received in the life and labors of Mr. Still. We sang *Jesus The Very Thought Of Thee*, and left the church for the cemetery. There, amidst glorious sunshine, Sandy Tait spoke of how the mantle of William Still had now fallen upon his children, and the mortal remains of the man were committed to the earth as the Philips and six of the stalwart elders of Gilcomston lovingly lowered the coffin into the grave. Finally, a spontaneous singing of Psalm 24:7-10, complete with hallelujahs and amens, was lifted to the praise and glory of God.

For me, the circle was complete. My association with this man of God began with the sound of his prayer, and was concluded with the sound of praise issuing from the children of his loving labors. What began for me on a dark, cold, rainy night, was sealed in sunshine, warmth, and fellowship which outshined the sun.

The good and faithful servant and fearless soldier of the Lord is now at home with his Master. Yet, the Lord's work wrought through him carries on in our lives. I am persuaded that what it has pleased God, in His loving grace, to shower upon so many in Scotland and throughout the world through the labors and love of William Still, shall prove to be not only fruit in the lives of multitudes, but also seed for greater fruit yet to be produced.

Most gratefully yours in the consolation of Jesus,

William Harrell

Dear Friends,

We join the world in the shock and grief felt over the recent tragic death of Diana, Princess of Wales. Who would have thought that she, who married the future King of Great Britain just over sixteen years ago, would end her life so soon thereafter, a divorced woman, killed by injuries sustained in a car crash in a tunnel in a foreign land? Two things should be clear to us from this: That the course of one's life rarely, if ever, goes as one would expect; and that death can come upon us very quickly and unexpectedly. These two rules apply even to those in the highest social, economic, and political echelons of the world.

About the same time the death of Diana was being reported, we learned also of sudden and unexpected death in another quarter of the world. Muslim extremists in Algeria attacked and killed more than 300 people in a village as they slept in the pre-dawn hours of their last day in this life. The villagers were apparently resistant to Islamic law, as indeed the government of Algeria is resistant to it, that government's embarrassment being the real object of the attack. Whatever the reasons for such mass murder, the result is the same for more than 300 Algerian villagers. Their lives were quickly and unexpectedly cut short.

We read in God's Word that the servants of the Lord are to redeem the time, knowing that the days are evil (Eph. 5:16). The term, redeem, tells us that some cost is involved, and that if the price is not paid, time passes being devoted to vanity and, indeed, to evil. When reports of sudden deaths come to us, we should do more than marvel, more than feel sympathy. Such sudden deaths should disturb our complacency, wherein we believe that we and ours shall live, if not forever, then at least for a good while longer. These dark providences should serve to remind us that our lives are not our own. They should serve to put to death in us any careless, casual, and presumptuous spirit we may have developed in our devotion to the Lord, in our love for the brethren, and in our service for the Lord.

Why are we not more careful to avoid sinning against God and against our fellows? Is not a large part of the reason that we believe we have plenty of time and will have, in the course of that time, increasing inclination to make amends? Why do we let our prayers grow dull and infrequent? Why do we not repent and keep short accounts when we sin against those nearest to us? Why are we not more urgent and bold in our evangelism? The answer to these and similar questions is largely that we assume that we and all others with whom we have contact and dealings shall live to see another day. But is this a correct assumption?

There is great wisdom and blessed fruitfulness in living each day in light of one's last day. This does not mean that we should grow obnoxiously intense, obtruding ourselves unwisely and unlovingly upon others. Such stridency would result from our equally mistaken notion that there will be no tomorrow, when, in fact, there may well be. But when we live each day so as not to have regrets before our Lord in the last great day, then, as far as our Christian service goes, we increasingly achieve the balance between zealous urgency and prayerful patience, between decisive boldness and considerate communication. With respect to our being careful not to sin and quick to repent when we do, there is no balance needed. Here patience is not a virtue, but a vice, rightly called procrastination. This lesson we learn, too, by our living in light of our last day.

When we live presumptuously, with no vital consciousness of an approaching last day for ourselves or for others, life becomes dull and dreary. Then patience is replaced by passive indifference; consideration for others, compassion, and deeds of kindness for them all wither in the dry air of pre-occupation with self; the fires of boldness and zealous urgency die as they are smothered under trivial distractions, fears and anxieties.

We may not have known Diana or the Algerian villagers personally, but they represent people with whom we do have contact and dealings. All of us know a few people of some measure of worldly standing and far more who are ordinary. Do our prayers include them? Are our prayers as focused on their eternal welfare as they should be? Do our words and deeds clearly communicate the contours of redemption in Christ to them? If we answer any or all of these questions in the negative, we may be sure that we are infected with a spirit of complacency and presumption. Let us lay the lessons of these sudden deaths rightly to heart. Let us

awaken from our slumbers and throw off the shackles of our trivial distractions and petty fears and speak with earnestness as dead men to dying men, telling them about the saving Redeemer and source of eternal and abundant life.

Faithfully yours,

William Harrell

Dear Friends,

Despite the fact that Scripture tells us not to be ignorant of Satan's wiles and not to be surprised when the enemy unleashes fiery ordeals against us, we are, often, caught unawares when we are attacked by the devil and by wicked men. This should not be. If we are surprised by evil attacks, does it not indicate defective preparation on our part?

There are a number of ways in which we can be unprepared for satanic attacks. A common failure in this respect is our not taking the devil seriously enough. We live in a day in which men wink at the devil, as though he were merely a rascally imp; or they glorify the devil, as though he were more interesting and more powerful than God; or they deny the existence of Satan altogether. Scripture portrays Satan as a most formidable foe--a roaring lion, a subtle serpent, a deceiver so adroit that he can masquerade as an angel of light. We make a most costly mistake if we think of him as some vague, impersonal irrelevancy.

Another defect in our preparation for evil days is that we often fail to take our own vulnerability seriously. Many seek their refuge from the enemy of our souls in things other than the Lord. Some feel secure in their own perceived (and, alas, frequently nurtured) insignificance. They reckon that if they stay spiritual nobodies, Satan will not feel threatened by them, and thus will disregard them. Those so reckoning, however, fail to reckon that Satan is not after us, but after our heavenly Father, whom he can grieve only through his successfully tempting into sin the Father's children. Our heavenly Father's love for His children is such that it grieves His Holy Spirit whenever even the least of His children falls victim to the devil's schemes. Our supposed insignificance does not render us invulnerable, for we are, in truth, most significant in the eyes of our God.

Others seek security in science and in social institutions. Here again, the inadequacy of such preparation becomes apparent when one recalls that our foe successfully invaded Paradise, and bought down our first parents who were created with upright natures. The very best environment is not sufficient to keep Satan away.

There are those who simply fail to take the biblical teaching about spiritual warfare seriously. Though the Word of God plainly and repeatedly tells us that we do have a determined and powerful enemy, that he will orchestrate persecution of all who determine to live a godly life in Christ, that we must withstand evil days and endure many tribulations--yet many believers live as though all of that were true for others, not for themselves. They expect a clear, easy path to glory for themselves.

This expectation of clear and easy going is perhaps most common. It is also most destructive. It puts one in a position completely antithetical to the true situation of believers, and it adversely conditions one's attitudes and actions accordingly.

The truth is that in our day of conveniences and cosmetics, we have come to despise blood, sweat, tears, wounds, and scars as being marks of failure and incompetence. We are wrong to despise the sweat of godly endeavor and to avoid the wounds of holy warfare. Wounds and scars are not marks of spiritual failures, but of true soldiers of the cross. We are at war, indeed, and we should expect to encounter enemies and obstacles and to receive wounds. It is better that we bear scars received for faithful stands, than that we have the smooth complexion of cowardly compromisers.

What, then, should be our expectation and action? We should expect opposing challenges, tribulation, and malicious attacks from the wicked--all as a normal and inescapable part of the Christian life. Our action in face of these should be to pay them as little heed as possible--as though we were equipped with armor which makes us impervious to their assaults. We should ignore the accusations, ignore the insults, ignore the threats, ignore the pain, and ignore the wounds we will receive in such spiritual combat, and press on in our following the Lord's leading in whatever particular project He may have called us to pursue. We must remember that even with the armor of God perfectly applied to our lives, we shall still suffer wounds. Remember that Satan wounded Christ on the heel; but Christ crushed Satan's head. This tells us that the

most Satan can do is annoy, while he is himself being annihilated. None of the wounds we receive shall prove mortal, for we have been given indestructible natures in Christ. Why, then, allow such wounds--or the mere threat of our receiving them-- to be detrimentally determinative in our living?

Perseveringly yours,

William Harrell

Dear Friends,

The theme runs through Scripture that those who vitally have tasted the goodness of the Lord cannot keep the blessing to themselves. That is because the very nature of the blessing is that of a gracious gift. Therefore, those receiving it find that it impels them to act as conduits of reconciliation, through whom the gift of salvation keeps on giving to others.

A number of elements combine to make up the force which impels believers to become heralds of the gospel. The directive of the great commission (Mt. 28:18-20), and the examples of bold outreach so prominent in the Book of Acts are indicators of what we should do. Such indicators may awaken us to our duty, but the power enabling us rightly to do our duty lies behind the words and actions, as causes of those effects.

What not only spurs, but also sustains us in our sharing the gospel is our own true and vital apprehension of it. For example, we must have vital experience and right apprehension of that from which we have been saved in Christ. When the reality dawns on us that we have been delivered from the guilt, shame, and punishment due to us for our sins, from the misery, bondage, and dominion of our sin nature, from the maliciously exploiting power of Satan, and from the just condemnation of God, we should experience a joy which is impossible for us to keep from expressing to others.

With a vital experience and right apprehension of that for which we have been saved, another element of evangelistically motivating power comes into play. We have been saved from death for life. That life is abundant, consisting of our growing conformity to the likeness of Christ. The fruit of the Holy Spirit becomes ours, growing in place of the fearful, ignorant selfishness which were ours apart from redemption. We are saved to belong to the family of faith, having become ourselves adopted children of God. We are saved to inherit inconceivable glory. A right and vital apprehension of what we have been saved for should fill our hearts with gratitude to the Lord, so that when He calls and commissions us to make disciples of others, we find ourselves happy to have opportunity to express in obedient faithfulness our thanksgiving to Him who has given us so much.

When we have a vital experience and right apprehension of the One who has saved us, then to our motivations of gladness and gratitude are added those of reverence and love. How could we not have reverence for the majestic, living God by whom and for whom we have been saved? How could we fail to offer as part of our reasonable service of worshipping Him the spreading abroad of what we know of His glory and love? Then, when we think on our Lord's mercy as well as His majesty, our hearts should be purged and empowered to show our love for Him by our zeal to share that love with others. Our contemplation of the cost He bore to redeem us should more than cancel any reluctance we may have to our bearing inconvenience, ridicule, and opposition in our evangelizing.

To all of the above must be added a love and gracious regard for others which also motivate us to share with them the only thing in all the world which will save them from current misery and future perdition. If we have received the merciful love and gracious care of the Lord, we shall find our own hearts welling up with loving concern for others, whereby we shall endeavor to help supply not only their legitimate temporal needs, but especially their deepest eternal need.

When we rightly turn our minds and hearts to the subject of evangelism, we begin to find unending and empowering incentives to share the infinitely precious, yet, by God's grace, utterly free gospel. Then we no longer wonder why the psalmist prays that God would not remove His Word utterly from his mouth (Ps. 119:43), he preferring to be dumb than to use his mouth to babble forth worldly trivialities instead of the heavenly treasure of God. Then we understand why the early disciples, in face of threatening foes and deadly persecution prayed only one thing: that God would grant them boldness in their proclamation of His Word (Acts 4:29-31). Especially at this time of year, when so much emphasis is placed on giving, should this gospel not be the one thing we aim to give to others above all else?

Faithfully yours,

William Harrell