



**A RETURN  
TO  
CHRIST  
CENTERED  
MISSIONS**

BY  
EARL LAVENDER

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## Dedication

To my loving parents, David and Edith Lavender – They gave me my life and my Lord.

# Acknowledgments

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the following people who made the publication of this book possible:

Rebecca, my wife, for her help in writing, re-writing, proofreading, typing, and for her constant encouragement to finish this work.

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The elders and members of the Centerville church of Christ, without their unfailing support and prayers I wouldn't have worked in Italy.

The many brethren who have so patiently taught me the ways of the Lord.

# Introduction

In his book, "A Return To Christ Centered Missions", Earl Lavender has undertaken to sound a kind of "restoration motif" for the development of missionary work. I am glad to offer these comments in merit of this work not only because of my long years of association with Earl's missionary parents, David and Edith (and now with their missionary son, Earl), but even more importantly, because of the value of the ideas presented.

Earl Lavender has done a good job of reflecting in his book his own philosophy and experience in missions. He decries the tendency toward professionalism that tends to develop in both local and missionary evangelism, and pleads for a return to the model of the New Testament where *all members* worked for the expansion of the church through the talents that they had received from the Lord. His own record of successful missionary work through the application of his interests and talents in athletics, music, and electronics stands as a fine example of this principle.

The emphasis on attitude taking precedence over method is also well stated. He is certainly correct in pointing out that there is no one way to go about doing missionary work. While this book is not intended as a plea for ignoring what has been learned and written by others concerning methods, yet as Earl insists, the variables are so numerous and changing, the missionary must remain flexible and free to do what works for him at the time and place where he is. As repeatedly pointed out in the book, the person who goes to share his faith in Christ because of a love of the lost and of their Savior, and especially of Heaven, and who attempts in a positive way to build and

to correct; that person will be the type of individual through whom the Lord can and will work in a most positive way.

At the conclusion of his work, Earl has included some observations given by his wife, Rebecca. These will prove helpful both to married women going to the mission field, and also to their husbands who can profit from a more accurate knowledge of the role and problems of married women in missions.

I am glad to recommend this work. From its basis in Scripture, personal experience, and the experiences of others (interlaced with interesting illustrations and a lot of good common sense), it will I am sure prove helpful in our mutual interprise.

Carl Mitchell  
Harding University  
Searcy, Arkansas  
7/21/83

## Preface

We live in an age of professionalism. Every field imaginable produces its "professionals". To be any less is to be a nonentity. It is disturbing to see the same tendencies in Christ's church. We school would-be preachers to the point they sometimes feel they are "professionals". Careful thought is given to previous schooling when a man is being considered for a preaching position. It is especially unsettling to see this inclination towards professionalism in missions. Please do not misunderstand my intent; I am certainly not against preparation. I am thrilled that we prepare our young men to preach through the excellent schooling offered by our Christian colleges and preacher training schools. It is even more encouraging to see the number of such institutions adding special missions curricula to their programs.

What concerns me is *ATTITUDE*. I am against professionalism in the church! Are we not all ONE in the body? "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself" (Philippians 2:3). My college degree does not make me a Christian, Christ does. My level of education does not make me better, Christ does. The important part of the body is the head, and ALL individual members (regardless of their skill level) work for the glorification of IT. I hope and pray more young men will accept the challenge of "sharpening their swords" through Christian education before beginning to preach or do a mission work. But let us all realize that a diploma or a master's degree or even a doctorate can only make us better prepared *SERVANTS*. We need humble servants preaching the Word. The important ingredient in our work,

wherever it may be, is the Savior, not the servant. Ask yourself sincerely, "Who do I really want to glorify, myself or my Lord?"

I have led singing since I was 12 years old. I have always loved music and nearly all my life have performed in all kinds and sizes of musical groups. While returning home from worship during which I had led singing (I was in high school), I was complaining of several mistakes I had made. My mother turned toward me in the car and said something I will never forget. "Son, you were not putting on a performance, you were leading Christians in praise to God". AMEN! Song leaders, you are not performing; you are praising God! Preachers, you are not delivering masterfully prepared bursts of eloquence; you are pointing men to God using HIS WORD! Missionaries, you are not seeking personal success and glory; you are presenting Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world!

Yet to see some of our "missionaries" (pulpit, youth, education, bus, family life, take your pick), you often need to make an appointment. You may get referred to one of his associates. Who are we really trying to glorify? What is our goal? Is it to have the best organized office staff? What has happened to the true mission of the church? Maybe this is the problem for some missionaries; they do not know what their mission is. A missionary without a mission? Or worse yet, the church of Christ without a mission. Let's get back to the basics, the restoration of His church in truth and purpose! "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). Beautifully simple and clear. The mission of *Christ's* church is to announce His Word to the lost! Let's not set up an appointment to introduce our friend to the "minister". Let's introduce him to the Savior! He is the one who makes the difference. And He can use any zealous, dedica-



ted Christian, regardless of his education, and an *effective* missionary! The real beauty of it is that He will use us as we are, with the talents that we have. The church is not an assembly line factory that spits out carbon-copied robots. The church is the body of Christ, each part having a different function, a different talent, a specific purpose. Each member is essential to the effectiveness of the body's mission. Not all can be the mouth; the body must also have feet. It is contrary to this Biblical concept to attempt to produce professionally pre-programmed, stereotyped missionaries of someone's idea of the "model missionary". The central theme of this book (by no means original!) is a call to return to *Christ-centered* mission work. The worker himself is not that important. What is important is his message, and that he be able to communicate it using his talents and capabilities. We are not taking ourselves to the world, *we are taking Christ and His sacrificial death that will save!* My parents did me a great favor when they sat me down just before I left for Italy (the last time I would be with my mother on this earth) and patiently explained this truth, "Earl, you have a lot of drive and showmanship in you. But whether you succeed or fail is not important. What matters is that you present Jesus Christ as the Savior. He will not fail." What a wonderful thought! It doesn't matter who I am, how I look, what talents I have, whether I am highly educated or not! What counts is that my Savior and Lord died for the world, and I have been given the marvelous privilege of using whatever talents I have to preach these Good Tidings!

Just one comment about the content of this book. Several of those who critiqued my original manuscript felt I was too negative in my references to former missionaries and their work. May I state clearly that I am convinced that numerous great men have worked in Italy and have

guided many to an eternal home with God. But as is always the case, much more could have been done if certain problems and attitudes had been avoided. My ONLY purpose in mentioning past mistakes and problems (while readily confessing that I have committed many such errors in my work) is to prevent us from making similar mistakes in the future. Such references to problems are never intended as an attack on any individual, but rather are directed against the sin itself.

I once heard a man say, while defending a young missionary's shortcomings, "We must all learn by making the same mistakes – it's just a part of the maturation process." I do not agree. Do we leave the same stones that have caused us to stumble in the path of life so that others may learn the same lesson, or do we clear the path to our common goal as Christ did for us? I have attempted, with love, to remove a few stumbling stones. I have fallen many times in my work. If I can help someone walk this difficult path with a few less obstacles, then I have done something meaningful. I ask you to accept in this spirit the references to past problems in the work for the Lord in Italy.

One of those who critiqued this book wrote, "I feel after reading this manuscript, *A Return to Christ-Centered Missions*, that you and Rebecca are in accord that it takes no special "super saint" to do foreign mission work, but with the proper spiritual preparation and Christian attitude and approach to others, we the ordinary can do an extraordinary task." This is my message.

The following is written as I work in Cervignano, Italy. My family and I have been here five years. It has truly been a joy to see the Lord's hand in this work. My purpose in writing this book is to share with you what I have learned through the rich experiences the Lord has blessed me

with on the field. I do not ask you to read what follows simply because I have written it. I believe the contents are based on Biblical truth and therefore are useful as we strive to preach Christ to a dying world. I challenge you to be a missionary for Him no matter what your occupation is in this life.

God give us strength, God give us a practical knowledge of His Word. God make us humble servants as we present our Redeemer to the perishing. Amen.

Earl Lavender  
Cervignano, Italy,  
Fall, 1983.

## The Publisher's Statement

I am happy to see a new emphasis in recent books on a return to Christ and the New Testament pattern in relation to world evangelism. As I see it, our failure to follow New Testament methods have resulted in a decline of our mission efforts throughout the world. There is nothing more discouraging than to see little or no progress being made, and how can we expect progress to be made when we do those things that are counter productive?

When the Lord gave the Great Commission, He also gave the Apostles and their converts a pattern to follow. In following that pattern, and using wise methods, then this led to world evangelism. When we follow their example, using those same methods, then the result will be the same. When this is not done, whether in the first century or in the twentieth century, then there can be no world evangelism. It is just that simple.

Bro. Earl Lavender has written this book on the basis of his knowledge of God's Word and the work he and his family have done in Cervignano, Italy. One may have the knowledge of mission work but it is only when he applies that knowledge in the mission field that the wisdom of following New Testament methods can be seen. Not only so, but having that knowledge, and that experience, and seeing how far brethren have gotten away from that pattern, then it causes one, as in the case of Bro. Lavender, to make a plea that we return to Christ-centered missions.

I would encourage all who are planning to go to the mission field to read this book. Surely every soul that would accept the great responsibility of taking the Gospel to

others ought to be interested in doing that in the most effective way. This book is designed to encourage that.

May each of us remember that Christ is the center of missions and therefore He is the center of our preaching and our efforts to spread his cause. When we preach Christ, and not ourselves, then souls are going to be led to Christ. Again, when we genuinely convert them to Christ then they are also going to become workers for Him, and therefore the Lord's cause is going to spread automatically. This is what we want and surely the Lord will accept no less.

J. C. Choate  
Singapore  
Sept, 10, 1985

# Contents

Dedication . . . . .	iii
Acknowledgments . . . . .	iv
Introduction . . . . .	v
Preface . . . . .	vii
The Publisher's Statement . . . . .	xii
Contents . . . . .	xiv
<b>Chapter I MUST WE GO?</b>	
The Great Commission: Imperative Or Privilege . . . . .	1
Saving Others Or Saving Ourselves? . . . . .	4
Motivation: Personal Success Or Love? . . . . .	8
<b>Chapter II HAVE I BEEN CALLED?</b>	
The Mission Of The Church . . . . .	11
Who Will Send Me? . . . . .	14
Just A Word About Receptivity . . . . .	19
<b>Chapter III DOES YOUR PLAN HAVE YOUR NAME ON IT?</b>	22
Methodology . . . . .	25
The Open Door Method . . . . .	27
"Friendship Ministry?" . . . . .	30
Team Missions . . . . .	34
<b>Chapter IV "I'M HERE TO SAVE YOU!"</b>	
Communication . . . . .	38
The Correct Attitude . . . . .	38
The Ugly American . . . . .	42
Language . . . . .	45
Culture . . . . .	48
The Power Of Positive Preaching And Teaching . . . . .	57
Paul And Positive Preaching . . . . .	64

Chapter V AM I "HOLIER THAN THOU"?	67
Developing Leadership	69
Rapport With "Native" Evangelists	73
Chapter VI "CONTEND EARNESTLY FOR THE FAITH"	77
Facing The "Anti's" Restrictive "Truth"	83
The Modernists: Enemies Of The Restoration	89
The "Wishy-Washy" Ecumenicals And The Case for True Unity	93
Speaking Falsely For God	97
Chapter VII TO GOD BE THE GLORY!	100
God's Power Today	100
The Laws Of Spiritual Motion	106
CONCLUSION	113
Appendix I FROM MY WIFE'S POINT OF VIEW	116
Count It A Privilege	122
Put Aside Americanism	123
No Room For Holier-Than-Thou	124
God First	126
Husband	127
Children	127
Example	130
Talents And Interests	131
Hospitality	133
Teaching	134
Appendix II METHODS OF WORK USED IN CERVIGNANO	137

## Chapter I

# MUST WE GO?

## The Great Commission: Imperative Or Privilege

‘Go therefore and make disciples’ is a direct command. But is it that we must go and make disciples, or is it that we have been given the privilege to go? The “Great Commission” has been presented for years as our great obligation, our *absolute* duty as Christians. It has almost become a “necessary evil” in the Christian life. Teaching Christ to others becomes a burden, a chore; it *must* be done or else!

“You can’t get to heaven alone; you must take someone with you,” have you ever heard that statement or one similar? The idea is not Biblical and certainly is not productive in saving souls. Did Christ die on the cross to force us to teach others of His love? Did we ourselves obey the Lord in baptism because we were obligated to do so? Wasn’t our obedience to the Lord a willful, joyful, grateful response to His unfathomable love? My friend, Jesus died to set us free and give us the *privilege* to share His love with others. The “Great Commission” is truly the *Great Privilege!* Motivated by our gratitude for His princely gift of reconciliation with God, it is a genuine joy to go and teach others of Him! This is the attitude we need to have; this is the attitude we must strive to instill in our young people. Serving the Lord is indeed living in the fullest. It is an abundant



life. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19,20) This is a positive command, a great *privilege* with a great *promise*! The Lord will accompany us; He will stand beside us! Let's take care to present the mission of the church in this light, and not "cram it down the throats" of our brethren to the point it becomes the "great dread" instead of the Great Privilege.

I will mention *attitude* often. It determines the ultimate success or failure of any particular mission work. One who attempts to present Christ to others because he feels he must, cannot compare to the one who joyfully proclaims the Good News as the result of his assured salvation. One is a slave in bondage, the other a son freed of his sins and heir to the eternal kingdom! Do you see the vast difference in attitudes? The one who teaches because he must has a self-centered attitude. He is on the mission field to save himself with his works. The one who teaches *because* he is saved has a Christ-centered attitude. He loses himself in the service of his King, his Savior, his Lord. He is "not ashamed of the gospel" because he is certain that "it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16)

We are no longer slaves; we are sons! (Galatians 4:7) "See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are." ( I John 3:1) We are children of God through His great love, therefore, with joy and hearts full of love for Him, we gladly shout the invitation for others to become sons of the eternal Father.

Shall we preach, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32), while we act as slaves, constrained against our will to obey our Master? Will anyone listen? Who would listen to a chain-smoker who has found a "sure" cure to stop smoking and yet continues to smoke one cigarette after another? How ridiculous we must look to the world as we proclaim joy and freedom in Christ while acting like unhappy slaves burdened with the absolute obligation of mentioning His name to others. Brethren, we have been freed by the eternal sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Our salvation is *secure* if we continue in His path. Now let's go and invite our friends and neighbors to the banquet set for all who are willing to come.

What about the urgency? What about the countless articles written that mention the mission imperative and the fact that we must go and teach? The urgency is there, and God's Word *must* be proclaimed to the world, but the reason is because Jesus saves! The urgency comes from the fact that without Jesus there is no hope, but "whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:13) We go, not because we must, but because the world is perishing and needs our Savior. If we continue to say, "we must go," our message is self-centered and gives the idea that we are most concerned about fulfilling *our* obligations to earn *our* salvation. If, instead, we proclaim, "the Gospel must go into all the world," our message, of necessity, becomes Christ-centered! As a result, we place ourselves (as we should) in the role of His servants joyfully bearing the news of salvation to the lost world. I realize it is a matter of emphasis, but if we are to be successful in our mission, then our work must be centered on Christ. And if indeed our work is focused on Him, it is truly a GREAT PRIVILEGE.

## Saving Others Or Saving Ourselves?

We, as children of God, are not salesmen working for a commission. We do not receive a percentage of our salvation for every soul "we save." Our motive for preaching Christ to others must never be personal gain in any form. We did not buy our salvation; dare we sell it to others? When Jesus sent His disciples to preach of the imminent coming of the kingdom, He set forth a principle that is certainly valid today for those who announce His Word. "Freely you received, freely give." (Matthew 10:8) Need we sell our salvation to others to buy our own? Is not God's grace given us through His Son's death sufficient to save us? Absolutely! Our salvation is secure in Christ's sacrifice. This is the Good News: you can be saved, you can be a child of God, and it is FREE! Our good works (including evangelism) will not save us. God's grace will. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast." (Ephesians 2:8,9) Salvation is a gift. And yet we continue to hear such excuses for not participating in soul-winning as, "I can't evangelize because I'm not a good salesman. It's just not my strong point." We do not need salesmen in the kingdom. We need zealous, knowledgeable (in the Truth), *saved*, humble sons of God willing to preach *Christ's* salvation with their lives!

Why do we evangelize? Are we trying to save others or ourselves? I am convinced that thousands of Christians are suffering needlessly because of a misunderstanding of this concept. "Are you saved?" they are asked. "Well, I hope so, but I'm not sure. I don't think I've done enough for the Lord, and I don't think I've been good enough. We'll just have to see." So they live in doubt of God's greatest promise! Of course we aren't good enough; of

course we haven't done enough. That's why Jesus Christ came to die for us! Do we dare think our good works will eventually save us? If so, Paul tells us, "Christ died needlessly." (Galatians 2:21) Think about it – if we can save ourselves with our works, then why did Christ have to die? How can we preach salvation in Christ while we are still bearing the weight of our sins? Will anyone believe us when we say, "Come to Jesus; He will give you rest."?



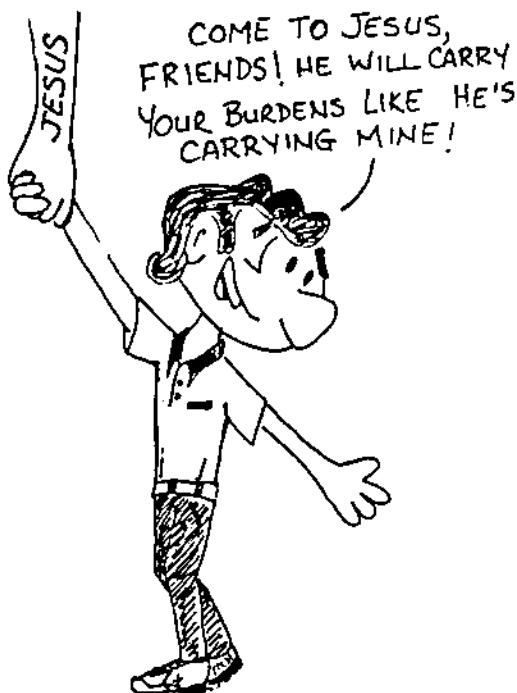
We have robbed ourselves of the joy of the security found in God's salvation! We suffer needlessly because somehow we think our salvation depends on us. John said, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know you have eternal life." (1 John 5:13) *We can be absolutely sure*

*of our salvation* because it depends on Christ and *not* on our good works. To God be the glory! We need not fear the end, for it is surely just the beginning of eternal life in the presence of our Maker. We have been freed from the weight of our own sins, and we shout to the world, "You, too, can be saved!" Are our works necessary? Certainly! But they are not the means to our salvation; *they are the result.*

"Therefore brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might bear fruit for God." (Romans 7:4) It is impossible to put into words the magnitude of our salvation. We were burdened by our countless sins; we had no direction in life. Then we heard the Word, we believed It, we repented of our sins, and confessing our belief in Jesus Christ, we were born again in the waters of baptism, and raised to a new life! What indescribable joy! Jesus saved me through His horrible death on Calvary! Now what do I do – perfect this salvation with my good works?

Paul asked the Galatians, "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3) How ridiculous! If we understand the magnitude of our salvation in Christ, we *must*, as a result, bear fruit for Him. If we do not, the fault is not in the sufficiency of Christ's saving power but rather in our own conversion. If a new life is not manifested by good works for the glory of the Father, a new birth has not occurred. "Faith, if it has no works is dead, being by itself" (James 2.17). The more we work for the Lord, the stronger our faith will become because we will see God's helping hand working with us. Therefore, as a result of our works, *our faith* can and will be made stronger (perfected – James 2:22). But our works will not perfect our *salvation*, for it is a finished (completed) work in Christ's death. We accept

this great gift in the waters of baptism by faith; we are cleansed from our every sin by His sacrificial blood; we are raised to a new life of service to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We should manifest an attitude similar to that of the prophet Amos. When told to cease speaking the words of God, he cried, "The Lord God has spoken, who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:8) So we cry, "Jesus has saved me! How can I help but spread this great news throughout the world?"



It was past midnight and my young friend was deeply troubled. He was the leader of a Catholic action youth group, a teacher of catechism. He had begun to see contradictions and problems in his faith. "I need your help",

he pleaded. "I can't help you", I replied, "but the Lord can." His response is one I'll never forget. "But you can help me find the Lord."

This is our task. Or better, this is our privilege! Confident of our own salvation in Jesus, we point the way for others looking for the Savior.

While on the field in Italy I have often been asked why I am here. Many want to know what's "in it" for me. Some workers might answer that question, "Well, it's something I feel I must do for the Lord," or "it is a command from God," or maybe, "I'm working out my salvation." The correct answer is one we all know by heart. Why am I here? "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). I have nothing to gain. Christ has already given me all. What more could I ask? I am saved! Out of gratitude, out of love for Him and my fellow man, I go and teach.

## **Motivation: Personal Success Or Love?**

In the eyes of the unbelieving world, one of the greatest failures in all of history occurred nearly 2,000 years ago. A man, called a prophet by some, the Son of God by others, taught great words of wisdom and a gospel of love and peace. He claimed to be the long awaited Messiah. But He was brutally killed on a cross between two thieves. A more resounding defeat was not possible. What a failure! The words of His own people still ring through the centuries, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself" (Matthew 27: 42)!

But to those who understand why He came, it was the greatest of all victories for He had fulfilled His mission. He did not stay in the tomb, *He is risen!* Have you ever stopped to think why He chose not to appear before the Sanhedrin after His resurrection to show them He was indeed the Messiah? Have you ever wondered why He didn't appear to Pilate, or to His Roman torturers? With the exception of James, his brother, and Paul, He appeared only to believers. Why? Because His coming to earth was not motivated by a desire to succeed in the eyes of the world. He came to save us because He loved us. After all, through Him all was created; what did He have to prove to the world? The very reason His coming was absolute victory was because He remained true to His purpose – He came because He loved. “For the Son of Man has come to seek and save the Lost” (Luke 19:10). Jesus had numerous opportunities to become a triumphant earthly king, but it was not consistent with the purpose of His incarnation. He could have crushed all resistance to His teaching and established Himself as the ruler of all His creation, but His mission was much more important. He came to save us – eternally. How could He bear such pain? How could He die the cruelest of deaths when He didn't have to? It is essential that we realize He could have called legions of angels at any time to prevent His death, but He *chose* to die. “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us” (I John 3:16). He left the glories of heaven and “emptied Himself taking the form of a bond servant, becoming obedient to the point of the cross” (Philippians 2:6–8). What unbelievable, unmeasurable, unthinkable love! He lowered Himself, He lay down His own life when He could have stayed in His eternal glory! But His love motivated Him to die for you and me. *Dare we be motivated by anything else as we work for Him?*

We have been trapped into looking for “receptive”



fields where the “yield” of “souls-per-dollar” will be highest. Many men are in the quest for a “successful work” for the Lord. Who is to say whether a work is successful or not? Successful in whose eyes? If our work is motivated by Christ’s love for the lost and our desire to share our great salvation with others, then it will succeed regardless of what man says! It is the Lord’s work and *He will not fail*. However, if our work is built on a foundation of the quest for personal success, it will fail *regardless* of its appearance to man. It is built on sand. If we will but preach God’s Word in love, it will not return void (Isaiah 55:11). God will provide the fruit. God’s love for all must be the foundation of our work. “Walk in love, just as Christ also loved you” (Ephesians 5:2).

If our Lord and Savior Himself did not seek personal success but instead gave *all* in love to those in need, can we do any less in His name?

Chapter II  
**HAVE I BEEN CALLED?**

**The Mission Of The Church**

Never before has the church had so many resources and opportunities to teach God's Word. Never before in the history of mankind has there been so many lost souls to reach. But does the church generally understand its true mission? We can, without much difficulty, identify the Biblical doctrine concerning the church. Its organization, creed, worship, and plan of salvation have been effectively restored. But the restoration has not been completed in the mission and purpose of the church. Jesus Christ came to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10) and gave this mission to His church as he ascended into heaven. Yet I fear that many congregations of the Lord's people have underplayed or overlooked this essential function of Christ's body. A human body that is deprived of a major function will soon die, and so it is with the church. The mission of the church *is to save the lost, not to entertain the saved*. I am troubled by the number of congregations that spend all their resources on themselves. Family activity centers, gymnasiums, beautiful auditoriums are built, and all church activities point inward. All of these facilities can be useful tools in the kingdom if used with the correct emphasis. But if we are not careful, the invitation to "outsiders" becomes "Become a member of our church, look at all the family activities we offer!" We can make a country club out of the church of God with such attitudes! But

Christ did not die to give us an excuse to build country clubs - He died to save the lost! Sometimes the excuse is given that a certain congregation wants to concentrate on strengthening its members before trying to reach out to others. But such a group is no longer a part of the restoration movement, and Christ is no longer its head. It has lost its purpose and direction. A church that does not evangelize cannot say it is the church of Christ.

In Mark 6 we find Jesus weary and full of sorrow. John the Baptist had just been beheaded. Jesus needed to withdraw from the multitude and pray to regain His physical and spiritual strength. His disciples were just returning from their first missionary journey and wanted desperately to spend time alone with their Master. But once again a great crowd gathered and though Jesus needed rest, His purpose for coming to this world was to save the lost. Thus, "He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and He began to teach them many things" (Mark 6:34). In this Biblical example "Intercongregational activity" took second place to the primary purpose of His coming. He sacrificed His needs to help those who were shepherdless. I'm sure the disciples grumbled that they really needed and rightly deserved some time alone with their Lord, but the Savior's priorities were toward the spiritually hungry, and so it must be with His church.

How about me, an individual Christian? Have I been called to such a mission? Yes, each of us has been summoned, no matter what we do for a living. The collective responsibility of the church is also the duty (privilege) of

each member. We teach (and correctly so) that God's love is given to us on an individual basis: that is, even if you were the only person on earth, Christ would have died for you. Shouldn't we then also teach God's mission in the same way? If Christ died to save us individually, then He also calls us one by one to His service.

"But it's not my job, I'm not paid to evangelize!" Maybe not, but you are *saved* to evangelize. We will discuss methods in more detail in the following chapter, but a word here is needed. We tend to limit drastically the meaning of the word "Preach". We have the idea that it implies standing up before a crowd and speaking to them of Jesus of Christ. Certainly it can mean that, but the real preaching of Jesus Christ is done with our lives. It is a way of life. Not everyone can stand up in a public assembly and proclaim Christ before men, but every Christian can and must stand up and LIVE Christ. "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship" (Romans 12:1). We must earnestly preach God's love with our lives. Christianity is not a search for God; it is a life given to the only True and Living God *FOUND* through Jesus Christ, our Savior. As Isaiah the prophet confidently accepted God's call for a spokesman saying, "Here am I, Lord, send me!" (Isaiah 6:8), we joyfully proclaim the same in the waters of baptism. You see, being a Christian without a mission is not a Christian. Yes, my brother, you have been called. And so have I. Let us accept the challenge to do our part in fulfilling the mission for which Christ died. Crossing the ocean does not make us missionaries; coming out of the waters of baptism does.

## Who Will Send Me?

While I am addressing every brother in Christ in this writing, I am especially interested in helping those considering working on the mission field. Some subjects that I will present may not seem applicable to every Christian, such as, "Where do I find a supporting church?" However, I suggest careful study by all members even on topics seemingly applicable only to the aspiring missionary. One never knows when he might be called to help organize such an effort, or chair a mission committee, or, as an elder in the Lord's church, make wise decisions concerning missions. Let's discuss the supporting church. A young man decides he wants to preach in a foreign land, but has no idea where to start looking for a congregation to support him. I believe this to be one of the most important factors in any successful mission work today. Besides knowing the Lord is with me through His truth and having the most wonderful wife at my side to help in this work, the greatest blessing I have is our supporting church. The congregation in Centerville, Tennessee has faithfully supported my family since April of 1977. My elders are the finest Christian men I know and have unfailingly stood behind this work for the Lord. If it weren't for them and their encouragement, I don't believe I'd be on the field today. I can only strongly encourage others to seek a similar situation. I believe the following principles will help:

1. Seek an active congregation for support. If a congregation shows little sign of life, they probably won't communicate and actively follow you as you work on the field.
2. If any one congregation does not assume your full support, make sure your sponsoring church (under whose

elders' oversight you will work) guarantees your support. There are too many stories of men on the field with successful works losing part of their salary and having to return to the States to raise funds. Many times, the cost of the trip itself would have paid the difference of their salary for a year. Their work is interrupted and sometimes permanently damaged because of their sudden departure. Once the missionary has his support and is on the field, he should be free from monetary worry and wholly able to concentrate on his mission. I have never had an anxious moment concerning my financial well-being and this makes a tremendous difference in my ability to dedicate myself to the work of the Lord here. One who is constantly worried about whether his next paycheck will arrive cannot be expected to do his best. If part of the worker's support is lost, the sponsoring congregation should take the initiative and responsibility to find the lacking funds.

3. I strongly suggest a period of working and living with the supporting congregation before departure to the field of work. Elders, if you are going to sustain a work, insist the man works under your direct oversight in your community. There are many blessings received from such an agreement. One, the worker and his family become a part of the congregation. The members become their personal and lifelong friends. Letters are much easier to write when one is personally acquainted with the missionary, and communication from the missionary will be more natural and spontaneous.

Two, the elders can closely observe the working habits of the future missionary. It should be a trial period: one in which the elders feel they can refuse to send the man if they are doubtful of his capabilities. This is especially important if the worker is young and has never labored

under the oversight of elders. I know of young men who have come to the field with no real past experience of working with the church, "green" out of college. They have no practical experience, though they are full of new ideas. I worked with the Centerville congregation for 18 months before leaving for Italy. It was the wisest decision ever made for me (the elders insisted). I learned more in that period of time than in the sum total of my previous experiences. For example, the elders taught me to be responsible for my time. They expected 40 hour work weeks PLUS visits and studies. Why? This is what we were asking of the other members, wasn't it? They had to work a full week, and, on top of that, we were asking them to make visits and personal work appointments. Just that one principle has been an enormous help to me. I learned to discipline myself timewise. If one comes to the field without having learned that, he is in a dangerous position. There is no one near him to tell him to get to work and to use his time wisely. Elders, workers, *insist* – the missionary needs to work with his supporting congregation before coming to the field.

4. Allow the congregation to help in the selection of the field of work. The Centerville elders sent a deacon and his wife, the J.T. Barbers, with my wife and me to Italy during a summer campaign to aid in the selection of the city in which we were to work. Together we reported our findings to the elders and the congregation, and a decision was made. The members felt they had a part in the selection process.

Just a word about the city we chose might be helpful here. Our supporting congregation (Centerville) is one of the largest churches of Christ located in a small town. The elders, therefore, chose Cervignano (population 12,000) as a target city. It has been a highly successful

work partly because of the size of the town. Our presence was immediately known and we've been able to have a greater influence on the community than we would have had in a larger city. It seems people have more time to discuss religious issues because they are not caught up in the rushed pace of big-city life. Someone might say that in a small town not as many souls can be reached. But our work is geared toward reaching individuals, striving to form one-on-one relationships and then teaching them the Gospel. We still use several methods to reach the masses (radio broadcasting and distribution of Bible material, for example), but the most successful methods by far have been those that have allowed us to form friendships with individuals. This type of relationship is much easier to develop in the small town atmosphere.

5. If the supporting or sponsoring congregation is not organized in committees, make sure someone is responsible for the welfare of the missionary family. Letters, cards, phone calls and any other type of communication can have a great strengthening effect on the worker. Besides the assurance of the Lord's presence, we have never felt abandoned or alone in our work. Other missionaries have worked years at a time with little or no significant communication from their supporting church. In such cases insecurity can set in, and the work suffers. The congregation itself can play a very important and active role in the work by continually encouraging their worker on the field.

6. Establish a regular system of communication. I write a weekly report that is included in Centerville's bulletin. It allows the members to stay in contact with the work.



7. Clearly establish the objectives you want to achieve before the worker leaves for the field. The missionary should have a clear idea of what his elders expect of him from the beginning of his work. Clear and straight forward communication between the missionary and his elders is essential in such matters. Included in this discussion would also be the length of stay and other similar points.

Many other suggestions could be given. The above are fundamental in forming a healthy relationship between the worker and his supporting church. There are too many stories of communication breakdowns, and the results are almost always tragic. If one cannot find a dependable congregation to support or sponsor his work, it is better to stay home and keep looking than to go on the field unsure of support. There are too many pressures put on one's shoulders when on the field to have to worry continually about support and financial matters. That alone can defeat a potentially good work.

Pray to the Lord and if it's His will, He will provide. "Go and teach all the nations". "How can they preach unless they are sent" (Romans 10:14)? The supporting congregation is part of God's plan. If one is a willing and capable teacher of God's Word, he will find a congregation to send him.

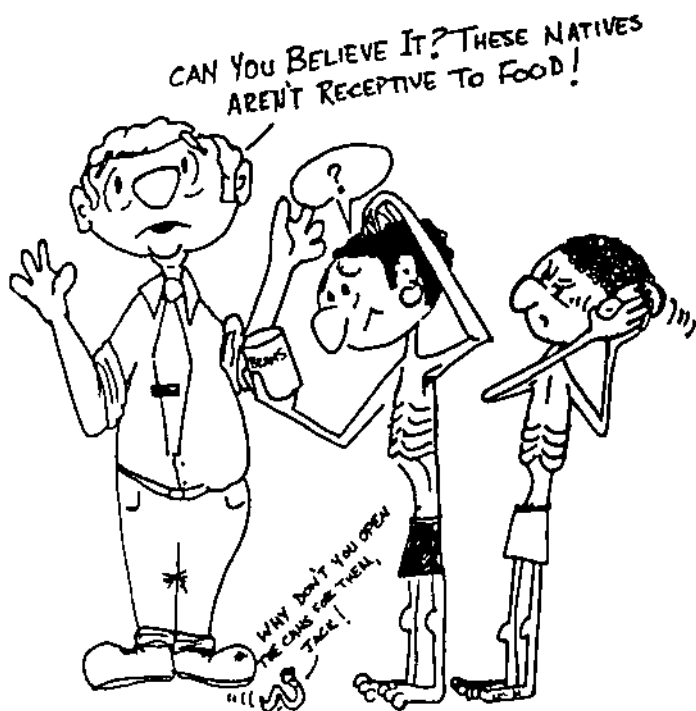
"And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests we have asked from Him" (I John 5:14,15).

## Just A Word About Receptivity

In considering where to go and work, the word "receptivity" is often brought into the discussion. "Is the field you are considering receptive to the Word?", I was repeatedly asked. At one particular missions workshop I was accused of sinning by some because I was going to "waste" the Lord's money in Europe. Why, everyone knows that Europe is an unreceptive field! I should change plans, learn Portuguese and take off for Brazil. There the natives are being baptized by the hundreds! I even heard several discuss the return of souls for the dollar! God save us from such perversion of our mission! Jesus said to go EVERYWHERE, the WHOLE world, and make disciples. The fields are white in every nation, and we have in our hands the *POWER* of *GOD* unto *SALVATION*! Who are we to judge whether a field is receptive or not? What is receptivity, anyway? Do you realize what it comes down to? One worker fails in his mission to make disciples in a particular nation, and he can't even consider the possibility that *he* has failed because he didn't understand the people and really didn't know how to communicate the Gospel in that nation. So he labels the field unreceptive! "Let's just write it off, that will show those natives not to accept me!" Millions are condemned to eternal death without having had the chance to hear the Truth **BECAUSE A MAN FAILED!**

When I came to Italy, I was half convinced that it was a lost cause. But after my years on the field, I can honestly say there is not a more receptive field in the world. But that's according to *my* definition of receptivity. I say a field is receptive any time souls searching for God can be found. Italy is a difficult field; the teaching process is long and hard. But there are many honest, sincere hearts

searching and praying for the Truth that will set them free. I don't intend to dig up the past, but Italy has had a very difficult and troubled one in the Lord's work. Satan has penetrated and destroyed many works that once promised great things for the kingdom. He has caused mistakes in judgment, unwise expenditures of funds, personality clashes, pride, and other problems to arise. Such things happen to us all. However, some past workers in this land (Italy) have been unwilling to face their own shortcomings and sins, and, in order to protect their pride, have labeled Italy "UNRECEPTIVE". This simply is not true. Italy is a field white unto harvest; we just need to select wisely the correct tools with which to gather the harvest.



Even at the risk of offending some and upsetting others, I suggest you don't spend much time in receptivity research. Don't calculate how much you'll have to spend to save a soul. That price was paid – *at Calvary*. Don't put a price on the blood of our Savior. He gave it freely, shouldn't we? Jesus said one soul is worth more than all the riches on the earth. Don't fall into the trap of looking for an easy field (do they really exist?). Go wherever you are prepared to go, where your talents will serve you best, where there is an urgent need. Then preach the Gospel, LIVE the Gospel and you'll find the Word of God powerful enough to penetrate every culture. The Lord will point you to souls searching for Him. Do you want a receptive field? "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15).

### Chapter III

## DOES YOUR PLAN HAVE YOUR NAME ON IT?

As one considers a particular work in any given field, he must clearly state his mission objectives. It takes time and careful thought, but it is essential for an organized work. One of the principles and practices I will never forget from my education courses while working toward my degree is to state clearly one's objectives and constantly work towards fulfilling them. They give purpose and direction to the job before us. What is the mission objective? It is absolutely necessary that the missionary and his elders discuss this before sending the worker to the field. There is but one mission objective and it is clearly stated in God's Word. Work after work has failed because the wrong objectives were set at the beginning. This is again due to a misunderstanding of the motivation factor. Because one is sometimes looking for *personal* success on the mission field, he sets his sights on the wrong goals. What might be a mission objective? The question I was asked most often when I return from Italy to the States is, "How many have you baptized?" This has been the one and only objective of many a mission: to baptize as many as possible. It may seem a noble and scriptural goal, but it is neither. When baptism becomes our reason for being, we tend to leave Christ out of the conversion process. Adequate teaching is not done, individuals are pressured into being baptized, and conversion many times does not take place. The missionary chalks up another baptism to "his credit", and many times feels his responsibility ends at that moment.

The teaching process stops at baptism! And why not? This worker's goal is already met. A newborn babe is left to die (if indeed he were ever reborn). Baptism is not the objective of our mission for the Lord. How about saying that establishing a congregation is our objective? Sounds good, doesn't it? To make it sound even better, we'll say we want to establish an *indigeous* congregation. Again, this is not the true aim of Biblical mission work. This objective forces the missionary into finding a meeting place and trying to fill it. All sorts of problems arise. What then is our mission objective? I'll let the apostle Paul tell you. "For Christ did not send me to baptize" (obviously saying this was not his main objective) "BUT TO PREACH THE GOSPEL" (I Corinthians 1:17 -- emphasis mine -- EDL). Some folks of the protestant belief think Paul is minimizing the importance of baptism. Not at all. However, he was saying that baptizing people was not his aim -- his objective was to preach the Gospel! Why? Because if the Gospel is preached in its simplicity and purity (not with cleverness of speech -- I Corinthians 1:17) and in its fullness, we will not just have problems, *but true conversions to the Lord*. The Word of God is the power unto salvation through Christ's death. Let's put Christ back into the conversion process! I'm convinced that if we would preach the Word more and worry less about the visible results of our work, more baptisms would occur! The Word is powerful: it is convincing; it is sufficient! If we preach the Word, and several respond to Christ's call and are baptized into Him, what do we have? An established church! "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them ..." (Matthew 28:19). Make *disciples* of all nations, and for one to be a disciple he has to know whom he is following. Teach him about Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and when he is baptized into the kingdom, continue to teach him. In Acts 2 after three thousand were added to the church when they met the Savior's blood in baptism, they "continually

devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). Baptism, when placed before teaching and preaching the Word, loses its meaning. There are baptized people who are not Christians because of some preacher's misplaced priorities. Let's not put the "cart before the horse" for reasons of self-glory ("look how many *I* have baptized!").

"For 'Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.' How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!' " (Romans 10:13-15).

You, brother, preach the glad tidings. Leave the saving to Jesus. One personal observation, and I do not mean in any way to offend, but I am disturbed by the number of preachers who keep statistics on how many have responded to "their" teaching. When they hold a meeting at a certain congregation, they send their "batting average and stats sheet" as an advertisement. I cannot judge their motives, but the emphasis is misplaced. We do not use "cleverness of speech" to cause an emotional response to our passionate plea. We do not preach to see how many will respond to "our preaching". We preach Christ and Him crucified (read I Corinthians 1). *He* saves; we do not. If our objective is indeed to preach Christ, then let us give Him the credit and boast in Him alone. After a sermon, I would much rather someone tell me how great the Word of God is, for if he tells me how great I am instead, I have failed. It is not the preacher, it is the Savior who is to be glorified.

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,

and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (Jude 24,25)

## Methodology

Now that we have established our objective – the preaching of the Gospel to the lost – by what means shall we pursue it? A word often used in mission discussions is

### THE “METHODS MAN”





“methodology”. It seems at times that everyone claims to be an expert in this field with the *very best* method, a sure fire plan that cannot fail. (It even occasionally bears their name.) Results are guaranteed. “If this method is used, we foresee (or even promise) an established, indigeous congregation with at least 250 members within ten years.” Just a moment. Who provides the results, our Lord or our method? We plant the seed, we water the field, but the *Lord* causes the growth! There is a real danger of allowing methods to become an end within themselves. They are no longer a means to preach the Gospel, and the Gospel no longer saves, the methods do!

I know of an evangelist that became so involved in his radio work (a method), he no longer had time to teach those contacted by radio. A family approached him wanting to be baptized (they actually presented themselves in this way!), but he was too busy with his radio work! His means to preach became his goal. One can use any scripturally approved method to teach the Word as long as it remains secondary to the *message* itself. You are not taking a guaranteed formula of work with you to the field; you are taking a guaranteed Savior. I really become upset when I hear someone present a particular method as the **ONLY WAY** to do God’s will. We should exalt Christ, not *our* methods. I am not a “methods man” for this very reason. I have seen them carried to extremes.

There is a congregation I know of that runs a “successful” bus ministry. They have not satisfied themselves with just encouraging others to try this means of teaching, they insist everyone must use it. Their argument? James 4:17! “To one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.” The bus ministry is the right thing to do, everyone knows about it, so if you do not do it, you are sinning! Have we truly reduced the cross of Christ to

this? Are we the Church of Bus, the Church of Radio, the Church of Team Missions, or are we striving to be the church of Christ? Yes, we need to organize our work, we need to use methods to spread the Word, we need to look continually for new ways in which to reach the lost; but let's not limit the Lord to ONE GREAT METHOD! Don't be a preacher of a method; be an evangelist for Christ!

## The Open Door Method

There is one method that is worthy of your attention. We will call it the ODM (Open Door Method). Are you taking notes? It is based on Colossians 4:2-6; "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; pray at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have been imprisoned."

We pray for an open door, watch for it, and then the Lord *pushes* us through it! I believe in God's active providence. We limit it when we insist on using *one* superior method. My original plans for the work I would start in Cervignano were based on an extensive use of a Bible Correspondence Course. I knew very little of methods when I arrived on the field. The "BBC" has not produced as I had hoped, but the Lord has provided many other open doors to preach His Word. The field itself will determine the methods one will use. We need to have a plan of some kind to direct our work when we arrive, but we must be flexible. If I had insisted on using only the correspondence course to evangelize, I would have left Italy several years ago in disgust and despair. I would have labeled Italy "unreceptive" to protect my own failure. I might have started looking for a nation that would be receptive to the

correspondence course method. But more likely, I would have left full-time church work – all because a means, a plan, a method, a man's idea was not effective in that part of Italy at that particular time. I believe the Lord will provide opportunities to teach in spite of what we do. We need to pray for the wisdom to see such opportunities! It seems we just keep ourselves busy with “great ideas” until the Lord provides a real teaching opportunity. He has a way to keep us from boasting!

The work in Cervignano (half way between Venice and Trieste) had begun a few months before. We started the work with a gospel meeting preceded by a campaign effort by the Project Italy group. We found good contacts as a result. One, Luigi, overweight and without a volume control for his voice, continually badgered me with suggestions. He knew it all. Most of his ideas were not worth the discomfort of hearing them shouted into my ear. One day, he began his idea session in a particularly bad way. “Earl, you just are not working hard enough.” (My automatic rejection process started, accompanied by more than a little anger). “No one knows you're here. Let's start a radio program!” he continued. Now, just a few miles away, a missionary had been trying for months to find radio time, and it had been “impossible”. So I said, “It's been tried; no one will let us do it.” He persisted. Finally, with hope of having the satisfaction of telling him “I told you so”, I agreed to look for a station that would allow us to broadcast a 30-second spot announcement a couple of times a week. Luigi wanted to begin with the biggest radio station in the area. I whined, “Look, be reasonable. Let's start with a small station, build a good rapport with them, then move up to a bigger station.” Nothing doing, he would not think of it. I have to admit I was thinking, “Oh, boy! This is going to be good. We're going to be turned

down for sure!" We climbed five flights of stairs and entered the studio. To my astonishment and to Luigi's, the station owner was his long lost friend! He had been in South America and had no way of knowing that this man owned the station. Before we left the station we had been *given* 30 minutes of weekly broadcasting time. Luigi said, "See, that wasn't difficult!" The first chance I had to be alone, I dropped to my knees and asked forgiveness for doubting God. I had learned my lesson.

The Lord opens door. Some might call it coincidence. I call it providence. What if I had not gone in the company of Luigi to that particular radio station? I'm afraid similar things have happened time and time again in the Lord's work. However, man doesn't want to admit it wasn't to *his* credit. So we read of amazing things some have done on the mission field, when actually it was the Lord providing the opportunity!

After broadcasting our weekly religious program several months, the station owner asked if I would consider "D. J.ing" a weekly hour-long program in English using American music. It sounded like fun, but I was concerned about using an hour of my time every week for such a program. As a favor, I decided to try it. "Welcome to America" is now one of the stations most popular programs and has been a blessing to our work for the Lord! More people know my co-worker and me and appreciate the fact that we can enjoy life and even act a little crazy. One night a young lady called the station during our show, and in the Queen's English asked if we would speak more slowly. Eventually she asked if she could meet us. Her mother is now a Christian and the girl herself is studying with us on a regular basis.

The Lord can do great things through us. Let's not limit

Him to our ideas. "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-21).

## "Friendship Ministry?"

An essential ingredient to the "Open Door Method" (the title is facetious, I think you know), is a willingness to participate actively in the lives of those around you. The idea that one must wear a 3-piece suit 24 hours a day and remain true to his preconceived idea of the role a "missionary" must play is self-defeating. What would you do if a foreigner moved into your community and opened an office for Bible studies, walked in every morning at 8 a.m., left at 5 p.m., always dressed in a suit and carrying a briefcase? Would you be motivated to walk into his office? I don't think so. Yet, this is how we have attempted to establish congregations in many places throughout the world. If you are going to teach Christ with your life, you must share yourself and your belief with others. *Make friends!* You can teach a friend much easier than a stranger. Some might call this "friendship evangelism"; I don't. Must we label every facet of our Christian life? Must we take everything that Christ asks us to do and make it into a "method"? Being a friend is a basic element of Christian living. If you love your neighbor, aren't you going to be his friend? This is not a new idea. Let's give our Savior credit for this one instead of making it someone's great and new way of evangelizing. Those converted on the day of Pentecost were "praising God, and having favor with all the people" (Acts 2:47). There was no organized friendship ministry - these Christians were simply living Christ, presenting themselves as living sacrifices to their Lord.

Their exemplary lives and their willingness to help all men caused them to be highly regarded by others. It was to the Lord's credit, not theirs. We don't make friends with hidden motives. Paul said, "Let love be without hypocrisy" (Romans 12:9), and so be it! People can discern when one is "making friends" for his own purposes. It is artificial. It is certainly not the *agape* love we are to have toward all men.

We were studying with a couple that once studied with the "Jehovah Witness" group here. At a certain point, they informed their "Jehovah Witness" friend that they were no longer interested in his doctrine. However, they also made it clear that they valued his friendship. It was the last they saw of their "friend". The experience left them with a bitter taste in their mouths.

We should not drop a friendship because one does not respond immediately to the Gospel. We continue living Christ before our friends, hoping and praying for the opportunity to teach them and convince them of their need for the Savior.

How do we make friends in a foreign land? Let me give you some specific examples. I hope these will suffice to give you an idea of the possibilities before us. I majored in physical education and have participated in team sports all my life. There is a semi-professional baseball team in Cervignano that I have coached and played with for five years now. I have heard some experts on missions say, "Leave your hobbies and special interests at home; you are going to the field to preach the Gospel!" It's a remark that usually bring several "amens" from the crowd. But why not preach the Gospel with your hobbies in your spare time? Through my playing, we have met and influenced the lives of hundreds of otherwise unreachable souls. During the

winter, I play for the basketball team that is owned by the village we live in. Again, we have influenced more lives that couldn't have been reached through other means. A young man who worked with us as an apprentice played in a concert band in another town nearby. Now that town has a very favorable impression of the church through his excellent Christian example. So the influence of the church has grown throughout our region in Italy. How? By what means? By participating in the lives of those around us and striving to teach by example.

In Italy and probably all the world, we do not need "pulpit-preachers" – we need *full-service* missionaries! A full-service bank will help you any way it can with your financial affairs. A full-service missionary will evangelize in any activity in which he can participate as a Christian. It may be playing a team sport, helping someone build a house, working side by side with someone as he cleans out his barn; there are endless ways to teach by caring for those around you. This is the point: you are not helping them because you want them to feel indebted to you; you are helping them because you love them and care for them. And you care because Jesus cares.

A short time after we moved here, an acquaintance needed help making an old house livable. What a mess! I worked with him for a full week. The effort included some very unpleasant chores. As a result of working with this man, I met his sister Leda. The man has not obeyed and may never respond to the Gospel, but I had the great joy of baptizing Leda into Christ. She was not attracted to the church because she believed in the restoration movement. She had been an atheist for 25 years. She was intrigued by the fact that I cared about her brother. If I had stayed in the office wearing my suit, I would have never met Leda. She helped convert

her son-in-law, a daughter will soon be baptized, and she gave us the building to use as a meeting place.

The Lord can take small offerings (remember what He did with five loaves and two fishes?) and turn them into marvelous blessings. He took a week of nasty work offered in His name, not really a significant sacrifice on my part, and reached and will continue to reach souls as a result. Walk through the doors of opportunity! Any deed we do for the Lord will bring good results. "And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have the *opportunity*, let us do good to all men" (Galatians 6:9-10). Accept the challenge of being a full-service, "do anything for the Lord" missionary.

Another thought concerning methodology: the essential ingredient of "open door" evangelism is found in I Corinthians 11:1. Paul says, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ." I have been in Bible classes where brethren were perturbed by this statement of Paul! "Don't you think he's a little too sure of himself? I think he's bragging!" No, he is merely doing what Christ asked him to do. If we can say, "follow me as I follow Christ," then any activity in which we participate becomes a teaching opportunity. We have been crucified in Christ, and it is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us (see Galathians 2:20). If you are not sure enough of your example to call others to Christ with it, you need to seriously re-examine your dedication to Him. We obviously will not and can not be "totally and perfectly" devoted, we cannot lead perfect lives, but we must live Christ-centered lives in all that we do. Those who teach that a "real" Christian cannot participate or better "waste his time" in such activities as sports, etc. (for one must be "totally-dedicated" to the preaching and studying of the Word) have not understood this basic



principle! *Living* Christ is preaching Christ -- IN ALL THAT WE DO! Paul could "become all things to all men" so that he could "by all means save some" (I Corinthians 9:22). Notice the next verse: "And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it" (I Corinthians 9:23). Do all things in the name of the Lord and for the sake of the Gospel, and everything you do will glorify God and bring forth fruit for Him. "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17). Do not limit the power of God and His providence by forcing Him to work through a single method. Look for open doors while living a *Christian* life. Catholic priests here often say, "Do as I say, but not as I do." Italians openly ridicule such a show of hypocrisy. Our message is: "Do as I do because I have found the Savior, and I strive to do as He says." *This* is the method that is guaranteed to bring about results.

## Team Missions

When Rebecca and I were first married, we had no intention of going to a foreign field to work for the Lord. Though I had worked numerous summers (including two with Rebecca) with campaign groups in Italy, I was looking for a coaching position. After all, my degree was in physical education. The summer we were married, the Project Italy campaign group returned with stories of a great need to help the people in the north-eastern corner of Italy who had lost nearly everything in a terrible earthquake. One young couple encouraged us to help them convince the elders of the Centerville, Tennessee congregation to oversee a relief fund for those in need. When we approached the elders they asked if I would be interested in following up the help by working as an evangelist in that area of Italy. And so God gave us the opportunity to come

and work in this land. We probably still would not have considered coming if it had not been for the other young couple. We admired and loved them very much and began making plans to work in Italy as a team. They were genuinely excited about the possibilities of working with us on the field. As the months passed, the other couple withdrew. We prayed long and often about what we should do. With the elders' encouragement, we came to the field alone. It was difficult for me because I had felt for some time that working as a team on the mission field was certainly a better way to start a new work.

After working in Italy for more than a year, I was asked to prepare a display of the Italian work for the European lectureships. I did not have the time to do what it entailed. I had heard of a young man and his family working in central Italy that were having a difficult time finding a house for rent and thus not being able to start their work. We invited them up with the intention of asking Gary Witcher (the young man) to prepare the display. Since we had experienced similar difficulty in finding a place to live, we also hoped to encourage and reassure them. It was a "fateful" day when they drove into our driveway! They are still here. Gary and his family have been one of the greatest blessings the Lord has ever given us in our work here. Though some said it would be impossible, within two weeks we found an apartment for them. The blessings that have come as a result of our working as a team are innumerable. Working together, Gary and I have accomplished things a man working alone could not do. Gary has been a constant source of encouragement. He and his wife, Amy (along with their three daughters) have contributed greatly to this work.

I could fill several pages listing the benefits of having a co-laborer, but I think most are quite obvious. Therefore I

would prefer to give a few positive suggestions concerning working with someone as a team. It is amazing that Gary and I work so well together. It should be enough to say that he is a Boomer Sooner from Oklahoma while I'm a scarlet and gray Buckeye raised in Columbus. (We don't discuss football!). I am impetuous; Gary is the picture of restraint and patience. I participate in sports; Gary is a professional photographer. I speak fast and often; Gary measures his words and seasons them with salt. I mention this just to say I've heard many stories of men who could not work together, men who now discourage team work. However, I'm convinced that if one will heed the following suggestions, he will be able to work within the framework of a team effort. If Gary and I can work together in harmony for the glory of the Lord, anyone truly intent on spreading the Good News can do likewise.

1. Let each man work with his own talents. Identify and use each other's strong points. Gary has been a great source of wisdom and I value his many talents. I recognize his supremacy in given areas and use it for the betterment of the work I do.
2. Avoid competition, and openly encourage each other's initiatives. There is no room for petty jealousy in the kingdom. Recognize the fact that all is for the glory of God.
3. Separate your responsibilities so that your work is doubled. There is a temptation to do everything together because it is more enjoyable. However, the advantages of having two evangelists are greatly lessened. If each has his responsibilities, twice as many visits will be made, twice as much work will be done.
4. Learn from each other. Gary has been a fount of spiritual insight for me; I hope I have similarly helped him. Grow together in the Lord.
5. Communicate openly. Be honest with each other. This is

vital. A lack of communication causes serious problems. Do not hesitate to follow each other's advice. Keep in close contact with each other's individual projects.

6. Give time to your family. Dedicate a day each week to them. This is essential for every missionary, but even more so with one working in a team effort. Because one is working with someone else everyday, he may not feel as great a need for the company of his family. But his family needs him, and he needs the time away from his work to relax.
7. Allow each family to follow its own life-style. Lead separate lives outside of the work. Reach out into different groups of friends (outside the church) and thus allow your influence in the community to double. There is a tendency for two families working together outside of the U.S. to form a "little America". This can be a real hindrance to the work. Do not allow it to happen.
8. Work side by side. Do not allow one to become the leader. Gary became my equal in the work the day he arrived. I hold no special rights because I "started" the work. It's not my work anyway, it's the Lord's. In the congregation there are not those of Gary and those of Earl. There are only Christians. To God be the glory!

In a way, team mission work is a marriage. As in a marriage relationship, there will be no real problems if both workers are truly subject to the Lord. If there is open and honest communication, and each worker strives to build up and encourage the other, then the Lord will be glorified and His Kingdom will grow as a result. The relationship between Gary and me has been an example to the community. We work together as brothers and sincerely respect one another. Many think we must truly be brothers – and so we are! I don't say this to boast, but rather to bring glory to the Lord, for it is He who has made us brethren. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

## **“I’M HERE TO SAVE YOU!”**

### **Communication**

One of the most important factors in a missionary’s work is his ability to communicate. If he cannot communicate, the message of Jesus Christ will never be known by those around him. Communication skills are not synonymous with language skills. Just because two people speak the same language does not mean they will automatically communicate. There are numerous factors involved. I will not attempt to present a complete work on this subject. Many well written books entirely dedicated to this matter have been published. I urge you to study carefully and extensively the challenge of acquiring communication and linguistic skills.

I have chosen to consider briefly three elements that are essential to successfully communicating the Gospel: 1) the correct attitude. 2) adequate language skills, and 3) cultural adaptability.

### **The Correct Attitude**

Here we go again – ATTITUDE. I place it number one in importance in successful communication. A bad attitude will defeat the message, no matter how skilled one is in a particular language. I know a man who had developed im-

pressive language skills in a foreign country, but his attitude towards his work completely suffocated the Gospel he preached. It destroyed any advantage he might have had with his mastery of that tongue. At the same time, I know many young people who have come to Italy on summer campaigns who have successfully communicated with no or very little language skills because their attitude was what it should have been as Christians. Fluency in the language is not enough. It must be accompanied by a positive Christ-centered attitude. One's outlook toward life and his work speak louder than his words.

What *is* the attitude one must have toward his work? One must ask himself, "What do I perceive myself as being?" I realize we are overlapping and repeating material covered in preceding chapters, but as Paul wrote, "To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you" (Phil. 3:1). Am I an American? Am I a "Church of Christ" (I shudder at the term), am I a southerner, a Yankee, or a humble servant of the Almighty God?

One cannibal said to his friend standing near the large pot full of boiling water, "This man said he came to save us!" The reply, "He sure did; we haven't eaten for a week."

Don't laugh – you would insult your own intelligence! Silly joke. But the "I'm here to save you" attitude is even more absurd. The tall benevolent American missionary bestowing his charities upon the poor lost natives is an image we must erase! *We* are not going to save anyone, but *Christ will!* "Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved" ... "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things" (Romans 10:13,15). We are the carriers with beautiful feet! Do you think there might

be a particular reason feet are mentioned? It is because they are the bearers of salvation, and not the saviors! We are the feet; the humble bearers of salvation. Christ is the one who saves! "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). Until we can say, "We are nothing, Christ is everything", our attitude will obstruct our every effort to communicate the Gospel message. "For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Galatians 6:3). "For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think" (Romans 12:3). ATTITUDE, ATTITUDE, ATTITUDE. When approaching any study of God's Word with one interested in the Truth, we can assume one of three points of view. One, "I am here to save you", which we have already discussed and eliminated as a possibility. Two, "I am here to study God's Word *with* you". The "I am here to teach you" attitude may not seem that bad, but it is self-defeating. Some of our best known methods for teaching the Bible insist on this "teacher-student relationship" during a study. Put yourself in the place of those who are studying with you. It is much better to identify with the persons contacted in such a way that you literally learn the Truth together. After all, we are not the proprietors of Truth; we are searching for it. We are not "*THE CHURCH* of Christ"; we are but members of the universal body of Christ, made up of every obedient believer. We obey the Truth to be added (by the *Lord* – Acts 2:47) to the church (assembly) of *CHRIST!* It is a matter of emphasis, but I am convinced that if we would eliminate our ego and leave the conversion process to Christ and His Word, more people would respond to *His* call. Most people have been in school at least 12 years of their lives and are not anxious to be students again. But if we approach them with the idea of learning together while listening to their questions, allowing and encouraging them

to contribute to the study, doors to good Bible studies will be opened more often. For Christ to teach, His Word must be presented by humble servants that, while guiding others to Him, must be willing to learn themselves.

It was my first “planned” study with Leda. She was a confirmed and convinced atheist. But she was curious of my “new belief”. As I opened the Bible, she joked, “And now, professor, what new truths will you teach me?” “I have nothing to teach you,” I answered, “but I believe the Bible is God’s inspired revelation to man and it has a wealth of wisdom to teach both of us. I’m not the teacher, we are fellow students.”

Leda (now a sister in Christ) later told me it was that very statement that caused her to want to continue our study. She had studied with “Jehovah Witnesses”, Mormons, and Children of God, but they all had everything to teach her and no time to listen. They “force-fed” their belief. Leda believes aggression is a sure sign of doubt, and I think she’s right. Those who blindly attack others with their faith are often trying to convince themselves that they have the Truth.

Having this attitude of studying God’s Word together is particularly important in nations like Italy where the state church continually teaches that the interpretation and study of God’s Word must be left to the priests. If we insist on rigidly directing every moment of every study, it leaves the impression we also believe the Bible must be handled only by our “teachers”.

God’s Word is like precious medicine. One must know the sickness before he can know how it must be applied. LISTEN, and then open God’s Word and let the Savior’s



message of salvation soothe the wounds of the searching soul.



## The Ugly American

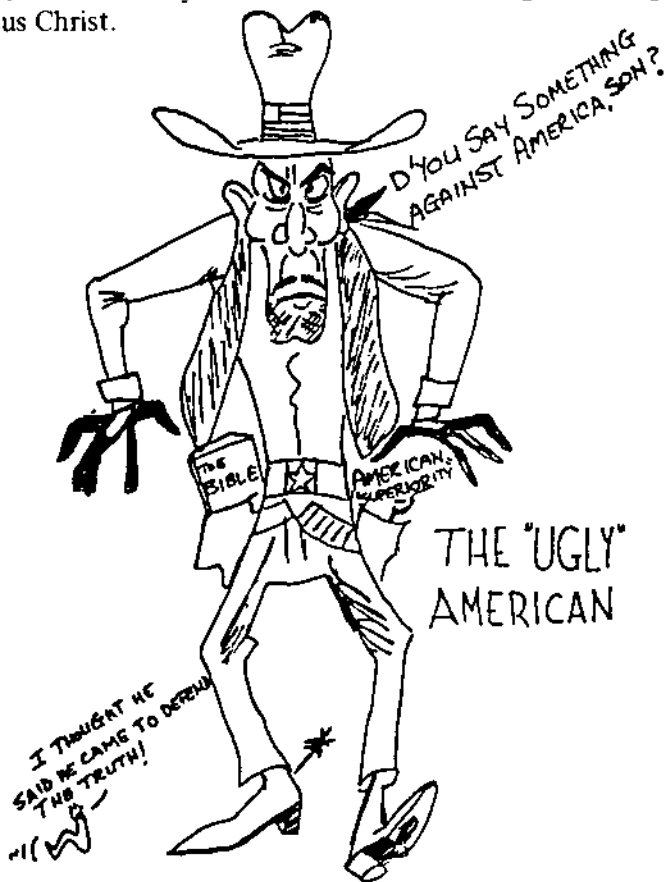
One more word about communication and attitude. When we are on the field, we are not Americans. Our citi-

zenship is in heaven. We are children, and in the church there are no nationalities. We must leave our American pride and prejudice at home. It's difficult to do. I'm as red-blooded an American as they come, but if I want to communicate successfully the message of Christ, I must leave my national pride in the back of my mind and concentrate on my true mission.

I had never met a more stubborn man. He was convinced that communism was the only way and Russia was a perfect paradise. *Everything* in the U.S., naturally, was corrupt. I felt offended and angry. When I could take no more, I slammed my fist on the table and began an impressive "apple-pie, America the beautiful" oratory. Abe would have been proud. When I finished the man was silent – totally taken back by my outburst. I felt great! I had defended my country.

I should have defended my Savior. Though this incident happened nearly five years ago, that man still knows me as the "table-slamming American". My nationalistic attitude may have eternally ruined my chances to reach that man with the Gospel. And what did I gain? The man is as much as a communist as ever, and we now have a barrier in our relationship. I built the Berlin wall. Why didn't I build the steps to salvation instead? The incident did help me because I did a lot of soul-searching as a result. Someone had cursed my country and I "gallantly" defended it. If someone uses my Lord's name in vain, am I equally moved to defend Him? Am I offended in the same way? Do I react in the same way? Do I react with the same burst of energy? Why not? Maybe it's because I've said with my mouth that I am a Christian first, but I'm really not. Our attitudes communicate more loudly than our words. Let's strive to show that our words and manner of living are con-

sistent! Let's truly leave all behind for the higher calling of Jesus Christ.



A young brother in Christ stationed at a nearby Italian military base was serving his mandatory year in uniform. He was telling me of a young man who was faking deafness, hoping to be sent home. He had withstood nerve wracking tests without flinching. The doctor, convinced of his deafness, wrote a pass to send him home. As the young man was leaving, the doctor whispered, "He

dropped his wallet". The "deaf" soldier, already out of the door, sped back in the room and shouted, "Where?"

I wonder if this isn't how we appear to the world. We say we are Christians – ambassadors for Christ – and like God, we are not respecters of persons. But when adequately angered, our true allegiances shine through.

I am thankful to God that I am American. It is a tremendous blessing. I am proud of my country. But if Christ called us to leave our parents and brothers and sisters to follow Him, then he asks us to leave all. Let's erase the "ugly American" and replace it with the exemplary Christian. In this way, we will reach the lost.

## Language

One of the greatest fears I have perceived in individuals considering working for the Lord in a land other than the United States is learning a new language. I personally know many young men who would be on the mission field today were it not for the language barrier. Generally, Americans are not psychologically inclined to learn a new "tongue". Everyone speaks English, some reason, so why bother to take the time and effort to learn another language? Not everyone speaks English, however, and if we want to successfully communicate the Gospel message to every land, we *must* learn and master the language spoken in the area in which we are working. The day of the interpreter is past (let us be thankful) and language skill is an essential ingredient in our work.

I have found there are generally two attitudes towards the learning of a language. There are those who place too

much emphasis on mastering to perfection a language and, those who do not think language skills are really important. There is a middle ground. Any man who earnestly desires to do so can learn a new language. Some gifted individuals will be able to converse with the accent and cadence of a native. But not every man is so gifted. Nor is it essential. If one learns the language to the extent that he can comfortably converse and communicate his ideas, he is already an extremely useful tool in the kingdom. Those who insist that one must speak like a native are not being realistic. It is true that in some countries refined language skills are more important than in others. But if one is really willing to apply himself, he can and will learn the language sufficiently well to be a productive evangelist. We must not allow the language barrier to discourage us from our mission to preach the Gospel to the whole world. At the same time, we certainly cannot take language skills for granted and fail to prepare ourselves adequately. Some have arrived on the field with absolutely no formal or informal language training. This has caused years of frustration by numerous individuals with great potential who returned home after varying periods of time, defeated by their own lack of preparation.

What is the best method to use in the learning of a foreign language? It is obvious that I cannot give a complete guide on this subject in these few pages. Nor am I qualified to do so. But I will present a few practical guidelines that have been a great help to me and hopefully will whet your appetite for further study on this matter.

Some suggest that one interested in working in a particular land devote two years to language study at a university in that country. The time should be totally and solely dedicated to language learning, they say. While this certainly has its positive points, it is not as productive as other

methods. I believe it has definite drawbacks. First, it teaches the individual nothing of the work for the Lord in that nation. Second, the individual has no way of knowing if this country is actually where he wants to work. And while it may be true that he has learned the language, he has wasted two years that could have been spent in the city where he plans to work.

A very positive and productive way to approach language learning is first to come in contact with your chosen field, ideally in a summer campaign for Christ. If this is not possible, some sort of survey trip should be made. Then, since a solid grammar background in the new language is of utmost importance – one should find some formal course of study while in the U.S.; privately or better still through a university. But the “only” way to learn to converse and really speak the language is to be in the country where it is spoken. An excellent way to do this while working is through an apprentice missionary program. We have had three young people work with us in this capacity, and it has been a very positive experience for them – especially in learning the language. They also were able to see the work and participate in it. This method is a university of two schools: the language and the work itself. I am thankful that many of our Christian schools are now offering such programs to young people seriously interested in working on the mission field.

The point of this short discussion is to plead with you not to let the language “barrier” stop you. Some are more talented than others, but any person can learn another language if he is really dedicated to his mission. It is hard work. But if one applies himself to working for Jesus in a foreign land where the church needs help, it can be done. “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

## Culture

An understanding of the culture is essential to one's work for the Lord in any land. Even if someone is working for the Lord within the United States in a region other than where he was raised, cultural adjustment will be necessary. However, for the worker who is willing to give himself first to the Lord, this, like the language, will pose no insurmountable problem.

Cultural adjustment and acceptance are not just important for everyday living; they are absolutely essential in communication. One must have adequate understanding of the culture (a shared system of meanings) if he wants to preach the Word. I have found that the ability to empathize with those we teach is one of the most important factors in sharing the salvation we have in Christ. If we cannot understand how someone feels about life in general, we will not know where to start with the Gospel and what approach to take. It is obvious that one would pursue a study much differently with a confirmed atheist than with a devout Catholic. But, if one does not understand a contact's cultural background, one cannot see that perhaps the "atheist believes in something (more so than the Catholic, many times), but does not want to believe in the God of Catholicism. If one is not able to empathize with the one with whom he is studying, he cannot understand why certain questions are asked, and therefore answers them incorrectly. There have been many comments made during studies I directed that have shocked and offended me – until I stopped to consider the person's background.

My friend had been to Saudi Arabia to work on a gas line. Upon his return, we talked at length of his experiences. He told me of the many devout Muslims he had

met. He then proceeded to tell me, "You see, religion is just like a coin: Muslims see it from one side; we ("Christians") see it from the other. But it's all the same coin. God will save all men. Don't you agree?"

The answer of many brethren would be "NO! THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY OF SALVATION." While this is certainly true, it was not the best answer at this point. Consider the problems and contradictions in this man's mind. He had grown up as a Catholic, believing more or less in Jesus Christ and one God. He considered himself a Christian. He also grew up seeing less than 5% of the people attend mass. He grew up seeing priests, his spiritual examples, lie and lead adulterous lives. He was raised in an atmosphere of "everything's alright as long as you don't get caught." Then he went to a "non-Christian" country. He found devout Muslims, actual practitioners of their belief, offering sincere worship to their God, devoting themselves to their faith. How could he rationally condemn those fervent people when comparing them to the example of Christianity known to him? He didn't know the Bible message.) He'd never seen a true Christian example. Naturally, his conclusion - "we're all saved" -- was the only logical one he could make. With that in mind, I carefully responded to his question, eventually pointing out that Christ is the only author of salvation. One must try to understand why a question is asked before responding. Some concepts and truths seem very clear to us because we have always known God's Truth and it is difficult to understand why anyone would have problems in grasping and comprehending them. It is moments such as these that it is crucial to try to empathize with the one you are teaching.

I had not been on the mission field long when I attended a Bible study conducted by another missionary. The



contact was truly interested and wanted to do the will of God. Baptism was being discussed. At one point, the missionary asked the contact to read Romans 6. "Now," he said, "isn't that clear? Doesn't that answer every question?" "Well, no, I'm still not sure," was the reply. "What! What could be more clear? You just don't want to understand!", the missionary shot back with obvious frustration.

Certain ideas may be crystal clear to us, and with the support of scripture, it is unfathomable that not everyone would understand in the same way. But we must, and I do mean **MUST**, understand the contact's roadblocks to comprehension or we will never communicate the Gospel. I am sure we have all been in discussions where two completely different concepts were being communicated because neither party attempted to comprehend the other.

The most difficult problem in the work in Italy is not to convince people to return to the Bible; it is to convince them that religion can and must be a serious subject. Religion for most Italians is nothing more than a set of cultural traditions. I once asked a priest what one thing should cause me to decide to become a Catholic if I so desired. He replied, "Well, if you were Italian I would say it would be better to be a Catholic. However, for an American, it's probably more culturally acceptable to be a Protestant. In the Middle East one should be a Muslim!" You can imagine if a priest feels such "conviction" what the average lay member must feel! I was talking to another priest on a flight to the U.S. who told me he was asked by a young boy who was greater, Muhammad or Jesus. He really thought he had come up with a great answer. "They're equally great!", he proclaimed. And he called himself a priest of Jesus Christ! This is why religion is not taken

seriously in Italy. Therefore, I must teach with these cultural factors in mind.

I can't teach "Return to the Bible!" It is unread, unknown, and thought to be the handbook of Catholic doctrine. I once took a survey of fifty young people, asking them what they thought of the Bible. The responses varied but most thought it was an ancient book that no longer had any real value. When asked if they thought it was any different from any other writing produced at that time, most replied negatively. All passed harsh judgement on the scriptures. The final question, however, was the most surprising. "Have you ever read any part of the Bible?" Every young person responded, "No". They had passed judgement on "The book of Books" but had never opened its covers!

Perhaps now you can understand why we can't teach the importance of the restoration; here this call has no meaning. This is the reason language skills are not enough. Words are worthless – it is CONCEPTS that we must communicate. Words represent symbols, and communication takes place through the interpretation of symbols in the brain. Even though the correct word or phrase is being used, one might break it down into a symbol that greatly differs from the one in the mind of the speaker. In Italy, even a word as basic as "Bible" is seen in a different light than what I am attempting to communicate. When I say "Bible", I think of the infallible, inspired Word of God. I say it with great respect. An Italian thinks instead of an outdated book of fables and gross exaggerations. He sees the Bible as a symbol of oppression that prohibits birth control, gives power to the Catholic hierarchy, and is totally irrelevant today. Who wants to restore that? With time and patience, one can be convinced of the Bible's

worth and truth, but only if I understand how he interprets the words I use to teach him.



THE SAME WORD CAN MEAN DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE

I find myself frustrated when I attempt to explain the absolute lack of sincere faith (in general) in Italy. When one mentions dedication to Christ, one thinks attending mass once a year is surely enough to show it. The priests often say, "Do as I say; not as I do." They are known for their worldly living. Everyone is alright, even if they don't believe in God. I'm sure you understand that this is not the

official stand of the Catholic church – but it is how religion is represented in everyday life.

Leda had been studying with us several months. Because her cafe was located on the main street of town, she was known by everyone in the city. And she was not one to be quiet! Not a day passed when we entered her shop that she wouldn't begin a religious discussion with others present. Before we began studying with her, as you will recall, she had been an atheist for 25 years. She hadn't attended mass or confessed her sins to a priest in all that time. One evening as I was studying the Bible with her, the phone rang. It was the local head priest. He was literally sobbing! I could hear his voice from across the room. "Leda, don't leave the church!", he pleaded.

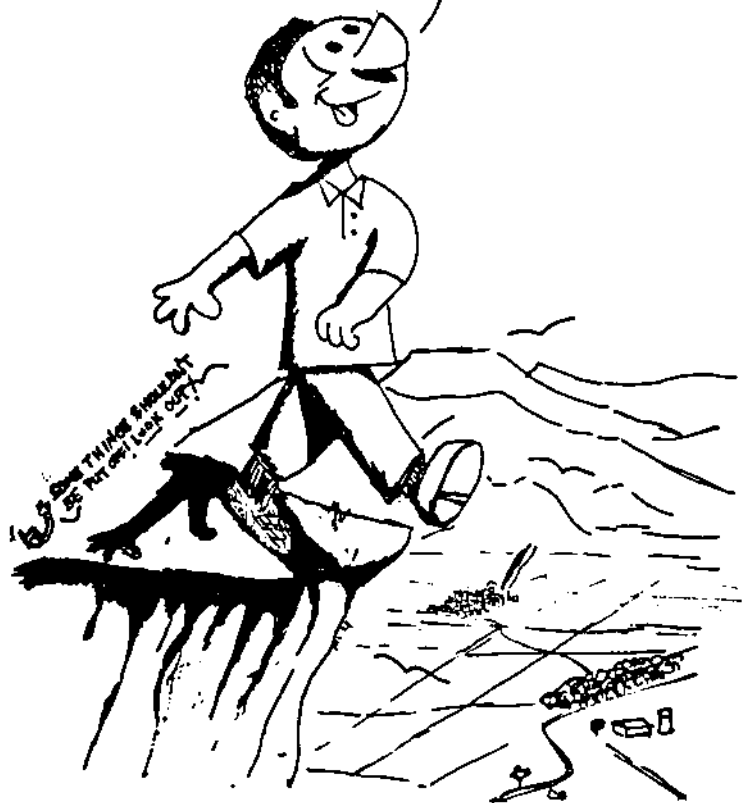
Those words still ring in my ears. Somehow I can't forget them. They serve as a reminder to me of the "seriousness" of "Christian" faith here. She had been an atheist for 25 years – but that was alright! When she began to study GOD'S WORD, her soul was in DANGER! Unbelievable! But sadly enough, it's true. Leda was excommunicated, her name smeared, her family mistreated because she decided to find her Lord and obey Him. Do you begin to understand how difficult it is to *communicate* Christ's message? I sincerely believe it is easier to convert an absolute atheist than an Italian Catholic. At least the atheist believes in something.

The whole idea of true Christianity is totally absent from the Italian culture. I have never been anywhere the Lord's name is used so often in vain. They even have expressions calling God a pig and dog, among other things. It's not unusual to hear a priest say such things in moments of anger. The political party calling itself the "Chris-

tian Democrats” is known to be the most corrupt. Children, from infancy, are continually bombarded with nudity and sex. Television is “X-rated”; their reliable news magazines are often pornographic. There is hardly a bar of soap or any product sold without some reference to sex. Can you imagine the difficulty of teaching Christian principles of morality and purity? Young people of opposite sexes think nothing of traveling together and staying overnight in the same hotel room or tent. I play on a baseball team here that will change into their uniforms in front of a crowd if a dressing room is not available. No one seems to notice. Someone might say I’m full of prudish American morality, but that’s not the problem. The problem is that the society is immoral, Godless, and skeptical towards anyone speaking of religion in a serious way. It is important that I know these things before attempting to teach Christ in this land. If the culture isn’t understood, communication will be difficult at best.

While describing what I believe to be the general attitude towards religion in Italy today, I don’t want to leave the impression that all people here are Godless and insincere. I believe the majority really don’t care and don’t want to be bothered by religion. I have often been confronted with words such as these, “Yes, yes, you may have something there. But religion is not important to me. If God exists, I’ll find Him later in life.” What a statement! If God exists you need to find Him immediately, because He is the most important thing in the universe. If He doesn’t, it’s better to find out while you’re young, and set your mind at ease. It is not a search one can rationally or logically set aside till later in life. But one would normally rather not be faced with such contradictions. There are fervent believers, but they too often contradict themselves. They tend to pick out what doctrines they find to be reasonable and laugh at the rest. I have found few Catholics

THEY SAY THERE'S A CLIFF AROUND - BUT I'LL LOOK  
FOR IT LATER! WHAT A BEAUTIFUL SKY!



who consider themselves to be under the direction of the pope. A teacher of religion (Catholic) once told me she did not believe in the worship of Mary, the Catholic saints, the baptism of infants, and the priesthood, among other basic doctrines. But she considered herself a fervent Catholic. Not believing in so many of the Catholic dogmas did not seem to pose a problem for her.

Many times a Bible study with a Catholic is similar to chasing a cloud – there is no substance to their belief. “Do you see that the Bible shows us that Peter was not the first pope?”, one might ask. “Yes”, comes the answer, “You’re right, but that doesn’t change anything for me.”

Mario, an elderly man, had attended several Bible studies. I felt he was genuinely interested in God’s Word. When I approached him about a private study of the Bible, his response shocked me. “Well”, he started, “I’ve studied with you enough to know you are teaching the Truth. But I was born a Catholic and have been one for more than 70 years. I can’t change now. Besides, my wife was Catholic. She died five years ago. Every week I pay for a mass to be said for her. If I change religion now, I’d lose all that money.”

I had no answer for Mario. He no longer cared to find the Truth.

A lot more could be said about cultural identification and understanding. I hope you can begin to see the problems one might face if he is not prepared adequately. If one hopes to successfully preach the Gospel, one must understand the people, the way they think, the way they react, the way they interpret certain words. Food, customs, life-style, and other adjustments can be made with little difficulty by one who is intent on serving the Lord. One who says, “I can’t adjust” is actually saying “Christ is not number one in my life; I am.” We have eaten octopus (fried, grilled, boiled), mule and horse meat, pig intestine, guinea pigs, and other things I didn’t have the courage to identify; but these are superficial sacrifices and adjustments. They are unimportant when compared to the task of truly understanding the heart of those with whom one is studying.

Until we can put ourselves into the other man's shoes and attempt to live his experiences with him, no matter how much language skill we possess or how much "charisma" we radiate, communicating the Gospel message will be obstructed by our lack of understanding.

Such understanding is obtained when one is motivated by the correct ATTITUDE. If we go to the field ready to learn and really care about the souls of the lost, cultural understanding will come. If, like Christ, we are moved with compassion, we will learn and adjust. If we are motivated by a strong desire for personal glory and showing off a great native accent, we will fail.

Christ knew the hearts of men because He was God. We can learn what another person feels in his heart because we are concerned and love him. The great thing is, no matter where you go, the Gospel is the same. It is universally adaptable. "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." May God give us the desire and wisdom to understand the souls of men that we might communicate successfully the Good News to them.

## The Power Of Positive Preaching And Teaching

When one is equipped with the proper attitude, develops adequate language skills, and a sufficient understanding of the target culture, it would seem that he is ready to communicate effectively the Word of God to those around him. Certainly, the Truth cannot be communicated without these factors. But there is one more ingredient – the most important of all – the *message*. Just because one un-



derstands the culture and can speak the language does not mean he will automatically preach the Truth. You may think I'm referring to those who advocate false doctrines, creeds of men, denominationalism, etc., and you're right. But I'm also talking about members of the church who preach a negative Gospel. Their time is spent in condemning the condemned! Who is going to listen to a foreigner rant and rave, pointing his finger at everyone, telling them they are going to burn in hell if they don't repent? Would you listen to a man condemning everything you regard as sacred? I am convinced that one can speak the Truth, quote book, chapter, and verse and say it in such a way that it is no longer God's Word or will.

I didn't realize the young man speaking in a nearby Gospel meeting was of the anti co-operation group. I took a group of young Christians and contacts to hear his message that night. After his sermon --a harsh presentation of the church's organization -- the meeting was opened to a question and answer period. A lady asked if it were proper for her to lead during worship. The young preacher's face turned red, veins stood out in his neck, his eyes bulged, and he screamed, "The Bible says, 'You sit down and shut up!'"

No, the Bible doesn't say that in the way he responded. Even if he had been right, his manner made the answer wrong. I Corinthians 13 tells us even if we have all knowledge, yet we are not motivated by love, we are nothing. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4 to speak the Truth in love; and so be it! "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). God's commands are good, they are just, they themselves are the love of God. He loves us, and with that great love He tells us how to live a joyful and abundant life that will lead us to eternal life with Him. His

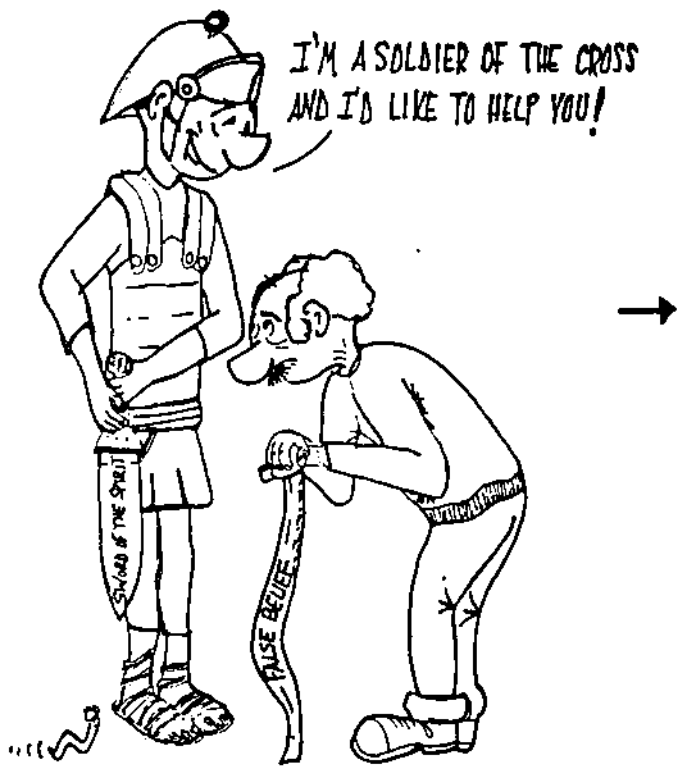
commands lead us to that eternal home. Therefore we need to teach them in a positive way. There is a reason for everything God asks of us. We don't obey His teachings *not to be lost*, we obey them to enjoy His endless blessings given to us through His Son.

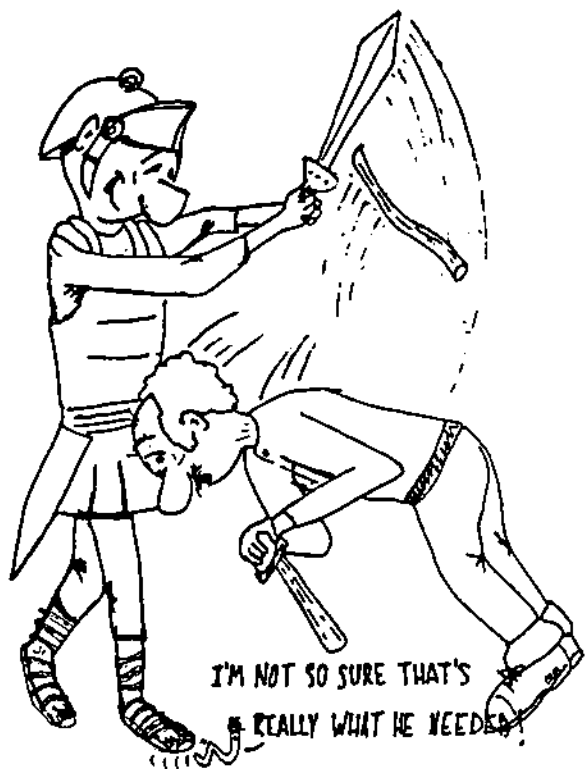
I believe in the power of positive preaching and teaching. It may be hard for our egos to accept, but God's Truth is strong enough to stand by itself without our help! We get so involved in tearing down walls of false doctrine that sometimes we forget to build with the Word of God. For years we have felt that one really needed to be prepared with anti-Catholic material before coming to work in Italy. There have been workers here that could list the Catholic councils with their proper dates along with the false doctrines established at each one. They could recite a brutal history of the popes. But could they present the saving message of Jesus Christ? I know they could, but many spent most of their time "condemning the condemned!" I have found studies to progress much more rapidly when I base them on God's plan for man. Those with whom I have studied, for the most part, have seen the problems with Catholic doctrine without my saying a word about them. Yes, false doctrine must be pointed out, but before we destroy someone's faith, let's give him something to hold on to. Let's first convince them that God loves them and wants to save them.

Is the "sword of the Spirit", as Paul calls the Word of God, a weapon for maiming and killing the perishing? God forbid! "For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:14). The Word of God can and will penetrate to the heart of man, but its purpose is not to kill, but to

heal. It is living and active – the “power of God for salvation” (Romans 1:16). It is a wonderful book, an exciting message, with a positive cure to man’s spiritual diseases! When one is critically ill, a doctor doesn’t tear down his last strengths! He carefully attempts to build the person up, giving him the medicine he needs. A true cure builds!

## IS THIS THE CORRECT USE OF THE SWORD?





If one would treat a sick man the way we often treat the lost, the sick man would surely die! And tragically, this happens many times in a spiritual sense. We find someone in sin, believing in a man-made creed, and the first thing we do is attack! "Do you use the musical instrument in worship?", we ask. If the answer is not as we would have it – "HA – HA!" We have found another victim to fall before the sword!

I was working with a cleaning crew preparing the dormitories for the coming school year at David Lipscomb

College. One of the young men in my crew had recently been restored to the church and really wanted to do what was right. With the best of intentions, he wanted to teach someone. He selected another young man on our crew as his "target". "Have you been scripturally baptized?", came the question. "What?" the puzzled young man asked. "I asked if you've been immersed for the remission of your sins, because if you haven't, you are going to hell," the young Christian replied. A profound silence fell on the room for the rest of the day. Later on, my friend asked me, "Why do you suppose that guy wasn't interested in the Bible?"

It may have been because the Bible message was never mentioned. You see, the message is not immersion, it is Christ and His death, burial, and resurrection. Christ came to save, not condemn. Man condemns himself with his sin. "I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world" (John 12:47). The sinful man who does not accept the Word has already judged himself. We don't need to waste our time judging and condemning him. Let's use our time to preach the positive saving power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Some might misunderstand what I'm attempting to say as a toleration of doctrinal error. I would never advocate such! But our basic approach to teaching must be a positive one. In Ephesians 4, Paul makes two comments that are worth discussing while on this subject. One we have already mentioned – verse 15 says, "speak the Truth in love." Peter wrote, "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3:15). The Word was never intended to be presented in any other way than with love and respect for the hearer.

The second comment of Paul that I want to note is in verse 29, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, that it may give grace to those who hear." Again, as in verse 15, Paul was speaking of our speech in general, but these concepts should also be directly applied to the manner in which we present the Word of God. *Build up* with the Truth! The sincere heart, if in error, will allow the Truth to defeat false doctrine. The announcement that one is headed directly for hell for his "false beliefs" is hardly edifying.

I plead with you to enter every study with the idea of building up the person with whom you are studying. One without the Truth is already a spiritual cripple; don't hack his crutch in half until he is leaning firmly on the Truth. He may throw his mistaken ideas away without your help. If he needs correction, do it with love and gentleness. "Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness" (Galatians 6:1). Certainly this applies to brethren in error, but the spirit is correct in treating any man's error. I am deeply concerned with the tendencies in my brethren to fight error with name calling and anger. I see articles in our publications aimed at the man instead of his error. Hardly a month passes that I don't read of some "giant of the faith" challenging a *brother* with whom he disagrees to a public debate. If this is our attitude toward brethren, can you imagine how we must treat someone outside the family of God? What are we trying to gain — a personal victory over "evil", or are we really wanting to regain a brother or save a lost soul?

Love insists that we preach a positive Gospel. Love demands that we construct and build with our words. May we have the wisdom to learn to use and speak the Word of

God in love so that we might be spiritual doctors – healing the sick and the lost.

## Paul And Positive Preaching

The apostle Paul is an excellent example of one who preached a positive Gospel. In fact, his life is the picture of positive thinking despite all his suffering. His letter to the Christians in Philippi is amazing! His attitude is overwhelmingly positive even though he was in prison. “Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, rejoice” (4:4). “I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am” (4:11); “the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (4:7). Now, turn to Ephesians and read one of the most thrilling passages found in God’s inspired Word; “That He would grant you, according to the riches in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen” (3:16–21). Read all of Paul’s letters and you will find a positive Gospel! Yes, he corrected error, and quite sharply at times, but he did so out of love and concern for the souls of his brethren.

It is fascinating to follow the life of Paul through Acts to see how he presented the Lord. One way was just through living a “positive” life in Jesus. Imprisoned in Philippi (after being severely beaten) we find him in the

company of Silas SINGING PRAISES TO GOD! After an earthquake occurred which liberated the prisoners, with the jailor ready to take his own life, Paul shouts, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here" (Acts 16:28). The man must have already partly understood Paul and Silas's belief through their singing and teaching, for he immediately asked what he must do to be saved. Paul responded in a positive way, teaching him the Gospel, and later that night baptizing him and his household. I don't think Paul wasted time condemning the man's pagan background.

Paul often entered the synagogues to preach of Christ. Notice again his attitude (for example in Acts 17:2,3), "he *reasoned* with them from the Scriptures," explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ." We preach a reasonable Gospel. — we have evidences to support our belief. But we destroy its positiveness when we try to tear apart another person's belief before presenting the Truth. Notice that Paul changes tactics when later in chapter 17 he presents God's Will to the Greeks of Athens. He didn't tear apart their belief in idols from the start; he finds something positive to say. "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you" (17:22,23). He later explains idolatry is not pleasing to God, but he does it with reason. The God who is so great that he made the heavens and the earth cannot be represented using stone or wood. He is too great to confine in a man-made temple. Paul, with the help of the Holy Spirit, chose his words wisely, seeking to instruct, not offend. What good would have been done if he had started his sermon at the Areopagus with, "You foolish pagans, you



will burn in hell if you continue in your idolatrous ways”? No one would have listened to his following message. Our teaching should be likewise positive, seasoned with salt, as we strive to understand the minds of those listening. In the synagogues Paul used the scriptures (the Old Testament) to prove Jesus was the Messiah. In the streets with the Gentiles Paul used reason and the Gentiles’ background to preach the greatness of God and His love manifested in the gift of His Son.

During my first study with Maria, she made it clear that she had no intention of leaving her Catholic faith for something new. At the end of our study she said again, “I will not change my religion.”

Some might have interpreted that as a “don’t come back” statement. But I continued to teach a positive message based on scripture. If I would have started to ridicule her past beliefs, I’m sure the door would have been eternally closed. Maria is now a sister in Christ, and actually, she didn’t change her religion. She had always tried to be pleasing to God and Catholicism was the only representation of Him she knew. She had no idea it was not pleasing or acceptable to God. As soon as she realized this, she obeyed her Lord in baptism and became a child of God – what she had always wanted to be.

I cannot stress this point enough: **BUILD AND SAVE WITH THE GOSPEL!** May it be said that we preach “Christ crucified” (I Corinthians 1:23) for the salvation of those around us. Once one understands this great love, he will obey the commands of the Savior. And indeed, after such an understanding of the positiveness of the teaching of our Lord, His commandments are not burdensome.

## AM I "HOLIER THAN THOU"?

Have I mentioned the importance of the correct attitude while working on the field? Well, here we go again. This time I want to discuss our rapport with new converts and with brethren who have been in the body for some time. American Christians aren't holier; they aren't better. In fact, in the body of Christ, there are no Americans. There are only Christians. The only citizenship that matters is that of heaven.

To you, this may seem a useless chapter, but after talking at length with Italian Christians, I am convinced that this "holier than thou" attitude of some past and present American missionaries has inflicted grave damage to the kingdom. Though the missionary may not openly say that he believes he's better, he shows it with his actions. The attitude is seen in those who consider themselves the "pulpit ministers", or worse yet, the "pastor." (Though scripturally incorrect I have seen missionaries assuming this role). He attacks the field with zeal and vigor, but never learns to regard those converted as his equals in the body. As the new members grow in the Lord, they almost become a threat to the "preacher's" pulpit! He continues to count the collection, serve the table, lead the singing, and does not even consider developing leadership from within the congregation. He becomes the de-facto clergy, and he seldom confers with national evangelists. He considers himself more valuable than they, and his ideas superior to theirs. He even attempts to tell them how to do their work. After all, he has given up so much to come to this

foreign place, and he is the one who has been schooled in the scriptures. It is only right that he does as he pleases, he reasons. You may think I'm exaggerating. But it has happened. The real tragedy occurs when such a worker leaves the field. He leaves behind spiritual babies, and the church either dies or "follows every wind of doctrine" that passes by.

Such men must think that they are somehow above the body of Christ. They move as they please without conferring with the members and leaders of that particular congregation. I know of American men who have moved into established Italian congregations without an invitation from the members with a program of work already planned. The Christians may have been glad to have an evangelist, but his action shows a serious lack of scriptural understanding. Can you imagine what would happen if a preacher would just show up one day at a congregation and say, "I'm your new preacher. I've already got my work planned out for the next few years, and I expect you to cooperate."? A "who do you think you are?" would be in order. And yet this has happened. Worse yet, in one particular instance, the Italians already had a young man preaching, but the American took over because he felt he was the only one worth hearing! Listen to me carefully, brother. We have no special rights in the kingdom because we are Americans! The "ol' red, white, and blue" doesn't fly in the kingdom. Peter said, "I most certainly" (clear?) "understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him" (Acts 10:34,35). There are no second class Christians; there are no first class Christians. We are all one in the body and subject to Christ. It is not a matter of letting the nationals feel important - they *are* important, and equally so with the missionary. He who does not subject himself to the plurality of the members

of the church is not in subjection to Christ. He is making himself the head of the body. Certainly he can and must give direction to the work, but he must not assume the role of the infallible pastor who does as he pleases against or without the council of the congregation.

I have seen the attitude of American superiority manifested in many other ways. I often receive questionnaires from American young people interested in the work in Italy. To my knowledge, these forms are rarely sent to the national evangelists. Who would know more about the work of the church in Italy: a man who has preached the Gospel for thirty years in his *own land*, or a relatively "rookie" missionary who has only been on the field for a short time? The answer is obvious, but somehow, because I am American, it is assumed that I am more knowledgeable of the situation. I could continue to list other ways that this improper, unchristian attitude shows itself, but I would rather state the principle that eliminates the error. In Christ, there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female, there is neither American nor Italian nor other nationality for that matter. For we are all one in Christ Jesus (see Galatians 3:28). "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ," (Philippians 3:20).

## Developing Leadership

One of the real challenges of any work for the Lord is the development of leadership within the congregation. It is also one of the most satisfying works. It is a thrill to sit at the feet of one you once taught the way to salvation as he preaches the Word! It is even a greater joy to see him

bring others to the Lord. I continually thank the Lord for the joy He has given by allowing me to watch new babes in Him mature and develop leadership capability.

Developing leadership in new Christians can only be done through a direct effort on the part of those leading the work. It doesn't just happen by itself. The missionary must be willing to work himself out of a job. When I first arrived in Italy, I was preaching every Sunday. When Gary came a year later, I began preaching every other Sunday. Now I preach every four to six weeks – if I'm fortunate! As much as I enjoy preaching God's Word (I feel like it's the "icing on the cake" in the work of an evangelist), I praise God and thank Him that *all* of our male members are willing and able to present a Gospel message during our worship services. They have a desire to preach the Word! Preaching is not the only leadership position to develop, naturally. We strive to include the male members in every decision we make. They participate in leading the congregation. We do not allow them to be spectators, watching their "preacher" do all the work.

Just a few suggestions on the development of leadership:

1. Stress through *example* and teaching that in the Lord's body there is no clergy or laity. The unity of the body will help contacts to see that they will be expected to participate in the work of the church upon their conversion. It is important that they understand this before they are converted. In Cervignano, it is natural for a young man to lead in some act of worship the Sunday after his baptism.
2. Have a well organized training program. Often this is more successful if offered on an individual basis, especially when working with a small group where there

are men of all different levels of spiritual maturity. This takes time, but it is certainly time well spent.

3. Criticize constructively and sparingly with the aim of edification. I have seen missionaries absolutely scandalized by a certain word used by a new convert during worship. Their over-reaction stunted the young man's spiritual growth. "Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass" (if we dare call the misuse of a word a trespass), "you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness," (Galatians 6:1). The process of spiritual growth is delicate, and correction, though certainly necessary, must be done with the proper spirit.

Let me say just a word about what I call "hypercritical righteous indignation". We need to be very careful to try to understand a new convert's past as we aid him in maturing in the Lord. Many times he will revert to past teaching just for a lack of knowledge in spiritual matters. He has not had the blessing of growing up in the church. Help him by supplying the needed information – don't show "righteous indignation" as if you have been offended. One young man recently used the word "sacrement" when presiding at the Lord's Supper. He did not know the term was not scriptural – he had heard it all his life in connection with the memorial of our Savior. One sister gasped so loud I thought we'd all die of oxygen starvation! After worship I pointed out to the young man the meaning of the word. He immediately understood and thanked me for the help. I then talked with the "scandalized" sister. Her problem was more difficult to solve. The point is that the kingdom must be made up of loving brothers and sisters. We should all be concerned about one another, willing to help each other as we *grow together* in the Lord. This must be the atmosphere present while developing leadership from within the congregation.

4. More than just leading in worship services, the men of the congregation should help in the leadership of the work itself. Hold a monthly business meeting, and allow them to actively participate. Follow their suggestions, encourage their input. Every month Gary and I present our work to the congregation and they criticize it (constructively) and give suggestions that really help. Needless to say, our work benefits from such input, they benefit from it, and the church grows because of it.
5. Do not force a man to assume a role in which he is not comfortable. We all have different talents to use for the Lord. Find work for everyone, but something they are capable of doing.

Roberto had been a member for some time. Being extremely timid, he had never been asked to lead the church in any way. One afternoon during a Bible study with him, he showed me some studies he had personally prepared. They were excellent! I encouraged him to present them as spiritual thoughts to the congregation. He didn't want to stand before the congregation, so I told him he could remain seated. So, for several years, the congregation has benefited greatly from Roberto's "spiritual thoughts" presented before the sermon every Sunday morning. Recently he stood before the congregation and led us in the Lord's Supper. Now he is wanting to be included in the preaching. It is truly amazing to see the change in his life!

6. Be sincere, but be generous in encouragement and compliments. It will help more than you will ever know.

It is possible to hand over the pulpit and the leadership responsibilities – at least it was for me. But I do so gladly because I know I won't always be here, and when I leave,

many will continue to preach God's Truth. For the good of the kingdom, missionary, be willing to share your role in the leading of the congregation with your brethren. Give up the pulpit. It's not yours anyway – it belongs to the Lord. May He be the one who speaks through His Word.

## Rapport With “Native” Evangelists

“Those savages! How do I deal with them? They actually think they are as good as I am!” It must be that many times thoughts such as these have run through the mind of some American missionaries while thinking of the national preachers. I say so because one of my biggest heartaches is my knowledge of some past actions and attitudes toward Italian evangelists on the part of American missionaries. I do not see the end of telling such stories: may it suffice to say they should be called “Legion”, for they are many.

One of the most rewarding experiences in Italy has been having some of these great men in my home. I was shocked when I invited several Italian evangelists and their families to enjoy Thanksgiving with us, and they told me it was the first time they had been invited to a Thanksgiving meal. These men had been preaching for a combined total of nearly a century with American missionaries working all around them and WITH THEM, and had never been invited to enjoy Thanksgiving with them! The missionaries regularly invited other American brethren from all over Italy to enjoy the day with them, but not the Italians. Can you imagine the hurt? “Second class” preachers in their own country!

I realize it might have just been an oversight, but I believe it shows a mistaken attitude. The Italian evangelist is



just not "up to the level" of the missionary. Decisions are made, great projects planned, millions spent, and all this is done without consulting the national evangelists who, by the way, know their people better than anyone!

I'm angered by men who speak at mission workshops of the importance of establishing "indigenous" and "autonomous" congregations and institutions in foreign lands when they themselves in practice do not respect this Biblical principle. As long as the natives agree with us, they are "autonomous", but should they disagree, this self-governing principle is often trodden under foot. It has caused endless damage and resentment. Why can't we regard our Italian brother as our equal? Prepare him in the scriptures and set him on the way, then allow him to lead. If his problem is doctrinal, correct him with love and understanding. If our differences are ones of opinion, LET'S RESPECT HIS!

I thank God for the close collaboration we have had with three of the finest evangelists I know: Italo Mines-troni of Bologna, Otello Pandelfini of Forli, and Paolo Di-Luca (as well as his father and brother) of Ferrara. You will notice they are Italian. They are Godly and wise men. Their ideas and suggestions have been a tremendous help to us, and I hope we have been able to help them. Otello does most of the speaking on our weekly radio programs (he sends us cassette tapes). He is an excellent speaker and has spent endless hours in this work. We were able to help him by setting up a recording studio for him in Forli where he has now begun a weekly program. We will also be helping Italo in a similar way. The congregation in Ferrara has their own radio station and has always been more than willing to help us. There are many great talents among just these three men, but they have been greatly mistreated in the past by "superior" feeling Americans.

The point of this is to encourage you, wherever you go, to accept the national workers as equals – because they are! Confide in them, plan with them, help them, let them help you. Instead of a hindrance, you'll find uncountable blessings in such a collaboration.

It all comes back to ATTITUDE and self-concept. Until we can lose ourselves in the Lord and allow His love to shine through our lives, we are not mature Christians. Our names have no importance, the Lord's name is all in all. *We are not on the mission field to advance our "careers" in the kingdom, we are here to advance the cause of Christ.* Therefore, we must allow our brethren, regardless of nationality, to help us and we must accept them as "more important than ourselves" (Philippians 2:3).

One of the greatest paradoxes (in the eyes of the world) of Christ's teaching is one He often gave. It is a key to Christian (Christ-like) living. "And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted" (Matthew 23:12). The missionary who really desires to make something of himself must first empty himself. The greatest in the kingdom is the servant of all. The one who considers himself to be one of the greatest in the kingdom may not be in the kingdom at all! If one thinks he is "holier" or better than someone else, one thing is certain – he isn't! It is the one who does not think of himself, but thinks rather of Christ and the needs of others that will be exalted.

Paul said that a "man should not think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but rather think as to have sound judgement." Whenever any Christian considers himself better than another, he certainly lacks sound judgement. Paul's point is made in verses 4 and 5 of Romans 12: "For just as we have many members in one body and all

the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." Then verse 10, "Be devoted to one another in honor." If we do so, then there will truly be unity in the body, and it will grow and bring glory to its head and Savior, Jesus Christ.

There will come a great day when we will all stand before God in judgement. There will be no nationalities, no races; there will be only two groups: the children of light and the children of darkness. How foolish and insignificant our past earthly citizenship will seem! How ridiculous it will seem that one child of God ever allowed himself to feel more "holy" than another, for we will be in the presence of our almighty God and His Son, and we will, for the first time, understand what "holy" really means.

Our call to the lost is to accept Jesus as their Savior and become co-heirs with him in the eternal kingdom. We are all adopted as sons; we are all members of the same body. God forbid that we should treat anyone for whom Christ died as though they are of less significance than ourselves.

## Chapter VI

# “CONTEND EARNESTLY FOR THE FAITH”

One of the greatest challenges to be faced on the mission field today is the battle for the defense of pure doctrine. It has been a real blessing for me to have to study carefully many truths that I, while in the States, took for granted as being doctrinal. I have been asked questions about God's Truth that previously I had never imagined. Every part of the doctrine I teach from God's Word has been bisected and carefully examined by interested contacts and new converts. Such close examination of my teaching has helped me to find scriptural answers to the doctrine we hold to be true. It is reassuring and comforting to be able to give scriptural answers to all questions. And not only that, it is essential. The challenge of this chapter is that you would ground yourself firmly in the Truth, “always being ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you” (I Peter 3:15).

Perhaps one of the greatest dangers of the mission field is in this very challenge. Being far away from the counsel of one's elders, it is easy to fall into teaching false doctrine if one is not prepared scripturally before leaving for his chosen place of work. One will find himself in a position of continually giving the “milk” of the Word and never receiving the “meat” he so desperately needs to continue in his spiritual growth. I have really missed attending Gospel meetings and other sessions of personal spiritual

growth. And without such points of reference, one can get “off-base” if he does not discipline himself to find Biblical answers to questions of doctrine.

One young missionary was questioned as to why the Lord’s supper had to be taken every first day of the week. Not being well-grounded in the scriptures, he was unable to give an acceptable answer. Soon he was teaching that it was not important that the memorial feast be observed on Sunday – any day would do. That launched him into other doctrinal problems.

This young man eventually lost his support, but has now returned to the field, teaching a confusing doctrine of compromise and human reasoning. I think through this example you can see the possible dangers. This is especially true if one is working alone, for he has no one to check his teaching. Those studying the Bible with him will certainly not be of the spiritual maturity or scriptural knowledge to correct his false teaching. For that reason it is essential that one is well-grounded in the faith before sending him. There is nothing more tragic than false doctrine destroying a newly planted work. Working alone on the mission field tends to amplify one’s problems with the scriptures, not decrease them.

This chapter was written last because it doesn’t appeal to me. However, I feel it is of utmost importance. If there was one area where I was not prepared before coming to Italy, it was the area of doctrinal problems existing in the work here. I have been educated as I have worked. I would have been more effective, however, if I had been aware previously of some of the doctrinal problems I would face. For this reason, I strongly suggest that you be aware of any particular doctrinal confrontations you might have in the field you choose. I found myself writing urgent

letters to my father and others in the States, asking for books and material to help me in my study to combat the false doctrines being taught here. I would have saved myself a lot of work had I been previously prepared.

I hope this chapter doesn't discourage or offend anyone. I include the following to help prepare you for the possible problems you will face. Yes, the work is exciting and wonderful, but I wouldn't be doing you any favor if I told you it was always that way. There will be moments of heart-break and there will be problems; but with the Word of God in hand, you need never lose against such adversaries. However, you must be prepared to "contend earnestly for the Truth" (Jude 3), especially in a day when more and more of our brethren seem to be willing to compromise truth for a false sense of unity with man.

I have often wondered how many times Christ has looked at Italy as He did toward the Holy City when he cried, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it" (Luke 13: 34). Literally hundreds of workers have preached here, hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of dollars have been spent, and after 35 years of work here there is little to show for it. There are perhaps 35 congregations and optimistically 800 faithful members in Italy today. What has happened? Is the Catholic church so strong that we haven't been able to attack it? No, I believe Satan has caused us to very nearly destroy ourselves from within. In many cases, the work in Italy has been Satan's playground. He has successfully pitted brother against brother. He has used pride, jealousy, and human error to destroy many promising works. Hopefully we will not allow history to repeat itself.

There have been *great* men who have worked in Italy

and done a *tremendous amount of good*. Their works will surely follow them for eternity. I do not pretend to know all of the good done in this land. However, sadly, many of the stories I have heard are of the inestimable damage done because of shortsightedness or an unwillingness to face existing problems, or the seeming quest for power of some former workers.

Let me introduce you to a very peculiar disease. I've named it the "Atlantic Syndrome". It seems to attack many missionaries as they return from Italy to the States (via the Atlantic Ocean, hence, the "Atlantic" syndrome). It is also known as the "Great Problem Erasing Phenomenon". What happens is men will work hard for years on the field, face all sorts of problems, but when they go home, the problems vanish! It's as if they never existed! They tour the U.S. speaking at mission workshops talking about the great work being done in Italy, without ever mentioning a single problem. If they aren't planning to return to the field, the syndrome gets really serious. It causes them to deny any problems ever existed! This type of white-washing will not heal the festering, open wound that serious problems such as false teaching have inflicted on the Lord's body here.

An Italian evangelist recently traveled to the States to speak at a mission forum. He presented a report on the work in Italy. He met with several formal missionaries (Americans), one of whom informed the Italian brother that he had recently talked with another Italian evangelist who happened to be of the "anti" persuasion. The former missionary was excited about a truce he had made with the Italian anti. The anti would not speak badly of the former missionary if he would promise to do likewise in his regard! Meanwhile, this Italian anti

was writing articles striving to destroy the church in Italy by further dividing it.

Needless to say, it was not a solution to the problem! But time and time again I have seen serious problems handled in this way by former workers. Since they are no longer directly involved in the problem, they act as if it doesn't exist. They want no part in the controversy, even if it is concerning a doctrinal matter! The Atlantic Syndrome strikes again!

Another Italian evangelist was raising funds for his work, and while in the States was asked to speak on a lectureship program. He noticed that another Italian preacher was on the program, one known to be teaching false doctrine in Italy. When the faithful Italian evangelist informed those organizing the lectureship that he could not speak on the same program as this man because of his modernistic teachings, a former missionary said with disgust, "We don't want to get involved in your little petty jealousies!"

The man was teaching false doctrine! He was advocating that women should be allowed to lead in public prayer, he was teaching that the instrument could be used if so desired during worship, he was denying the supernatural aspect of the miracles of the Old Testament; but since he had crossed the Atlantic (I'm sure you realize the ocean has nothing to do with it, it's a matter of getting away from the problem) these doctrinal matters were reduced to being petty jealousies! Can you imagine how the evangelist that was "contending for the faith" felt when confronted by such an attitude? What must we do to awaken the brotherhood to the serious problems we face on the field?

This brings up another aspect of the "Atlantic Syn-



drome". At times it seems that brethren in the U.S. are almost too prone to draw lines of fellowship over doctrinal issues or even matters of opinion. But if one crosses the ocean or border, anything goes! If a congregation is supporting a man known to be teaching false doctrine, many would rather not know about it! Concerned brethren wrote the supporting church of a man teaching false doctrine in Italy, and they were told to mind their own business! What is our business as Christians if not that of contending earnestly for the faith once delivered? Could it be that some congregations want to say they are supporting a man on the field regardless of what he teaches? Perhaps they want to print in their bulletins that they support a man in Italy, or India, or anywhere. But brethren, false doctrine is false doctrine no matter where it is taught, and it must be corrected. Acting as if the problem doesn't exist will not solve it! And yet in many instances it seems that elderships will do just about anything to avoid controversy, especially if it involves a foreign work.

We are fighting a raging battle from within! Yet few seem to be ready or willing to pick up the sword of the Spirit and fight the battle to defend the Truth. False doctrine does not just fade away when left alone; it is a cancer that will destroy the church if not removed! May we have the wisdom and courage to stand for the Truth. However, let us *always* remember to attack the *sin*, and not the person. Often in an attempt to destroy a false doctrine, we attack the person teaching it. When a battle of personalities is started, the Truth no longer plays a part. Let us defend the Truth and regain our erring brethren for the growth of the kingdom! "Brethren, if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness" (Galatians 6:1).

With the aim of preparing you for what you might face

on the mission field, let me present three problems we have faced. They are serious doctrinal problems that must be defeated. The first and most unbelievable is the "anti" problem; the second, the modernist problem; and the third, the problem of "wishy-washy" brethren who, for the sake of unity, are willing to accept anything.

## **Facing The "Anti's" Restrictive "Truth"**

Satan must have really enjoyed planting this problem in Italy. Although the "Anti" group is small, they own a printing press and monthly send out their poisonous publication, "The Straight Path" (Sentieri Diritte). I wasn't prepared to face such a problem when I arrived on the field, but it happened that two young men preaching this doctrine moved into our immediate area, so I was forced to confront it.

It would be profitless to explain how the anti's got started in Italy. It is enough to say that they are a direct transplant from the States. I understand some anti cooperation congregations cooperated to send some men over here to "re-educate" some Italian preachers. Many turned them down, but they found a couple of men with sorry attitudes that were more than willing to teach this doctrine in exchange for support of their work. As in many places in the States, these men do not evangelize or even attempt to begin new congregations. They enter in congregations already established and divide the membership. Here they have serious problems, for we have no orphan homes to condemn, we have no national radio or television program to "endanger" our congregations' autonomy. But they do their work just the same. They condemn the "sponsoring church" idea (though it doesn't exist in Italy), no kitchen

in the “church”, no ping-pong tables, according to them we certainly should not desecrate our buildings by eating in them, and so on. The result of their work? One of the congregations in the area where they moved into once had 18 attending – soon only 2 remained.

I, for one, cannot fellowship these people. I have been told by some to look upon them as poor, ignorant brethren who just make mistakes with their misplaced zeal. But they are legalists, teachers of false doctrines, dividers of the Lord’s body, and have very little of an idea of what *Christ-ianity* is all about. Furthermore, these men do not have the love of God in their hearts. “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and every one who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (I John 4: 7,8). Christ came to “seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10) through his great love. These men seem to want to condemn and divide the *saved!* Paul’s treatment of such men is clear: “Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting” (Romans 16: 17,18). These are not servants of Christ, but are slaves to their own desires for power.

It is ironic that these “scholars” use I Corinthians 4:6 as their main battle cry. It is one of the verses that condemns the very thing that they do! “That in us you might learn not to exceed what is written.” Read the chapter. Paul is warning against the danger of going beyond what is written to judge others. Now, we certainly cannot and must not change the doctrine of Truth (Galatians 1; Revelation 22:18,19), but neither can we go beyond what is

written to judge our brethren. If John 9 tells us that “he who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God.” One who judges his brethren by his own opinions is indeed going too far. He no longer abides within the doctrine. And as mentioned before, such a man does not possess the one ingredient that identifies him as a true disciple of Christ – LOVE.

An evangelist was speaking to an American airman who was based in Italy. The airman decided to take his family to worship with an “anti” congregation many miles away instead of with the congregation near the base. When this man was asked on what basis this decision was made, he replied quite proudly, “I have discovered your (the evangelist’s) supporting church has a kitchen in it – you’re a liberal!”

How tragic! The blood of Christ that cleanses us from our sins in baptism and makes us brethren has been debased to “whether we have a kitchen or not in our church!” Let me tell you something, we have no kitchens in the church! We have only Christians! The church is not some “sanctified” building, it is the assembly of the saved. I have yet to meet a group of people with a kitchen in them, or worse yet, a ping-pong table. Now, if you want to know if the first century Christians had kitchens in their MEETING PLACES, read Romans 16:5. It is very probable the church met in a place that had a kitchen, considering the fact that they met in the house of Priscilla and Aquila.

The church of Cervignano received a circular letter (sent to all the congregations in Italy) from the anti group declaring their main points of doctrine. It was an ultimatum. “You either agree with us on these points, or you will be disfellowshipped” was the intent of the letter. The list included such “important” doctrines as the condemnation

of "external structures" that do the work of the local church (Bible schools, orphan homes, and such); condemning means of evangelization other than those specifically "authorized" by the scriptures (on the list of no-no's - Bible camps, campaign groups that sing publically, using puppets for teaching children, etc.); the condemnation of intercongregational cooperation; and the condemnation of the "horrible" sin of helping "non-saints" from the collection. Quite a list! I looked once, twice, then three times, but I found no mention of our Savior, Jesus Christ!! I found not one reference to His sacrifice and His love. No, to these men such things are of minor importance when compared to the doctrines of what we can or cannot do as a church! In effect, our fellowship is not based on whether we have obeyed our Lord in scriptural baptism and continue to follow his commands, it depends on whether we cooperate as brethren or not! My soul weeps bitter tears! Let me quote the conclusion of the above list of "doctrines". "We do not feel united with those who practice these false doctrines. Not only do we feel non-united with those who practice these "perverse" doctrines and *do not repent* (emphasis mine - EDL), but we feel profoundly divided with all who do not abide in these doctrines of Christ" ("Fede e Fatti", anno II, Ottobre-Novembre 1981). I wrote a letter (against the council of some who felt it was useless) to the congregation that published the bulletin containing this article. I wrote, "I am deeply saddened by the spirit of Satan that has entered you. Any group that would dare call themselves the "church of Christ" that would list the doctrines on which they base their fellowship with others and *not even mention* the name of their Lord, will surely be severely judged on that great day." I received no response.

Tragically, this is only the beginning! These men (few in number but full of hatred) have even threatened brethren

in their publications. You can imagine what effect this would have on one studying the Bible for the first time and reading such unchristian words in a publication supposedly dedicated to the preaching of the Gospel! Let me give you an example, lest you think I'm exaggerating. In one particularly hateful article against an American missionary one of the "anti" preachers writes, "I will destroy you." He then says of this fine missionary (and I mean that sincerely, the man he was attacking is the picture of Christian love), "all those that when they smile show you 32 teeth, that when they pray they kneel, that when they speak they make you think, 'blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed', that when they speak of love they half close their eyes and open their arms, all such are hypocrites, or accomplished actors!"



(Alessandra Corazza, "Sentieri Diritti, vol. VI-N; 7, Luglio 1981, p. 326). This man knows nothing of Christianity. Such sharp and hateful sarcasm has no place in the kingdom. I'm glad he never met the apostle John, for I think he was probably very much like the man he described – one who advocated love and opened his arms to his brethren, one who smiled often (I imagine he even showed his teeth). But such a display of Christian love was prohibited by this man. Enough! I could go on and on, but this is sufficient to show you the depth of the problem we face.

How does one deal with such a problem? The first and most important decision to make is whether or not to inform the congregation of the problem. Many past workers have considered themselves the "watch-dogs" of their flock and therefore would not include the brethren in on what should be done. While this may have been done for noble reasons, I feel this attitude has led to many problems here. When the missionary leaves for home, he leaves a group of unprepared, untested warriors to fight the battle against false doctrine. Gary and I therefore decided to inform the congregation of the problem, with the hope of preparing them for the future when they will have to stand alone. It was a painful Sunday morning. Here we were in a nation where only one in every 66,000 was a member of the Lord's church, and we had to advise our brethren that some of those who had obeyed Christ had strayed from the Truth. During the Bible study hour Gary and I carefully explained the problem. We then searched the scriptures together and came to the conclusion that indeed these men were not teaching the Truth. We had to decide what we as a congregation should do. After talking to several Italian evangelists on the phone, we decided it would be best to correspond with individuals that we knew personally in the congregation in our area that had accepted these "anti" ideas. We were warned by the more experienced

Italian evangelists that the article (with their list of beliefs) had been written to provoke a response and thus begin an endless debate. There is nothing these false teachers would like more than to tie up an effective evangelist in an endless argument. Therefore, we are still corresponding with several individuals in the "anti" congregations. They are disturbed by this "new" teaching they are hearing and we care for their souls. I am still thankful to the experienced men who told me to avoid a fight with the "anti" preachers. These faithful evangelists had already been abused by the anti's many times in the past. Paul says, concerning such controversies with men who don't want to listen, "Shun foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law; for they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned" (Titus 3:9-11).

## **The Modernists: Enemies Of The Restoration**

Those that teach the "modernist's" doctrine are a very real threat to the brotherhood. They are sly in their deceit. While the "anti's" worst enemies are often themselves because they continually show they are unchristian by their actions and words, the modernists continually preach "love, love, love". For them pure doctrine loses its importance when confronted with their all-encompassing love. They are the extreme opposites of the antis.

What must be realized is that God's love is greater than our own. And, "this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burden-



some” (I John 5:3). *God’s love is found in His commandments!* God does not ask us to jump just to see if we will jump; every command is for our benefit. If we will retain purity through a *true* love for Him (“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments”, John 14:15) we will live an abundant life that will never end.

Love is undoubtedly the most abused word in the English language. In the name of love, doctrine is compromised and salvation lost. Love is not some intangible sentiment that is beyond definition – at least not the “agape” love of the New Testament. It is a love based on careful thought and reason. It is many times greater than sentimental love. While sentimental love continually fluctuates, agape love is always strong. Agape love is not a feeling, it is a behavior. Our Lord’s commandment to love our enemies seems impossible until we realize what He asks is not that we feel a warmth and closeness to them, but that we behave in a loving fashion toward them. We choose to love them, even though their behavior toward us may be something less than desirable.

If we truly love God and our fellow man we will not betray Biblical doctrine for a sentimental feeling of friendship and unity with men who believe in a doctrine “a bit” removed from the New Testament. God’s love allowed Him to send His Son to die for us (John 3:16). Christ’s love caused Him to empty Himself and die miserably and painfully on the cross (I John 3:16). Our love will cause our unquestioning obedience to His Perfect Will. We must not allow ourselves to be carried away from pure doctrine (wherein lies the love of God) by the current of a false, superficial love of mankind. Ironically, in so doing, we condemn man eternally by neglecting to teach him the Truth that sets us free.

I believe that Truth consists of two parts: doctrine and love. One without the other is incomplete. If one knows what he must do and does it (according to doctrine) but has not love, he is nothing (I Corinthians 13:1,2) and his "obedient" act is unacceptable. On the other hand, if one is "all love" and does not abide in the doctrine, he has not God (II John 9). The two – doctrine and love – are eternally fused together in God's plan.

The modernist's teaching has caused irreparable damage to the work of the Lord in Italy. It has carried faithful congregations into fellowship with nearly any group that will call itself "Christian". One congregation, once faithful and active in the kingdom, has now been reduced to an unidentifiable conglomeration of denominational ideas. There is no pulpit (from which the Word of God is spoken – not that we must have a pulpit, but this was done to eliminate the idea of the authority of God's Word), the Lord's supper is no longer observed on Sunday unless someone "feels" the need, the women lead in the "spontaneous" worship services, several musical instruments are used during worship, and its name (thankfully) has been changed. Tragically, there are other similar situations. The identity and doctrine of the church have been destroyed – all in the name of love.

We recently received a letter from a brother in southern Italy warning us of an Italian evangelist who had held a meeting in that congregation. The following list is made up of excerpts of this evangelist's teaching in that meeting:

- He urged the acceptance of the Apocrypha as inspired books.
- He explained the miracles of the Old Testament as natural happenings, not supernatural interventions by God.
- He doubted Moses wrote the Pentateuch and was certain

Daniel wasn't totally written by Daniel, but was probably finished a couple of centuries after the life of Christ!

- He taught that every sincere believer will be saved regardless of his doctrinal belief, from Catholics to Pentecostals.
- He believes that the five acts of worship are too restrictive and formal. Worship must be spontaneous as we are moved by the Spirit. Naturally, all should be free to lead (including women) if so "moved". Preaching is discouraged because it smothers participation. The instrument should be used to help our singing; the collection need not be taken every week.

Need I write more? The church's identification is totally lost in this liberal teaching. According to it, all we have to do is follow our feelings! The church has no mission for all are already saved. The tragedy is that the young man teaching this doctrine was once a faithful preacher of the Gospel, but fell under the influence of a "great scholar" who led him away from the Truth. At first this young man compromised his feeling toward those who used the instrument in worship, and once such a compromise was made, it opened the door for other false doctrines to enter his heart.

In our direct dealings with this problem we again felt it was best to inform the congregation and warn them of the dangers of such teaching. Just a few weeks after we discussed this problem with the members, a liberal faction from a nearby city asked if they could meet with us. We included several members in the meeting. It was a sad yet also a very productive occasion. Sad, because these people, though once faithful to the Truth, were obviously no longer interested in the restoration of the true church; yet it was productive because Gary and I said very little to defend the Truth – the members themselves defended the pure doctrine in a marvelous way. They decided they

could not fellowship those who no longer followed the teachings of the New Testament.

John's exhortation in his first epistle (4:1) is essential if we want our newly planted congregations to "contend earnestly for the faith". "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone into the world." It is obvious that not every new convert will be ready for such battles, but they must be led toward a spiritual maturity that will allow them to defend the Truth against every feasible enemy of the cross. Give them milk, but make sure they grow toward the meat of the Word. "For every one who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who because of their practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil" (Hebrews 5:13,14). We need to actively train Christians in this manner if we want the congregation to remain faithful to its calling.

## **The "Wishy-Washy" Ecumenicals And The Case for True Unity**

You may think I'm referring to liberals and modernists by naming this group the "all for the sake of unity" people. But I see this as another very serious problem. This group consists of brethren who know the Truth, abide in the Truth, but are unwilling to make a stand against doctrinal error. What has happened to the Daniels: those who will take a stand without concern for their personal welfare? What has happened to the Davids? Remember the young shepherd boy who stood against insurmountable odds and, with the help of God, won? Remember Joseph?

Tormented by his master's wife he said no and suffered the consequences of the woman's lie. He remained faithful to God and eventually was second only to the great Pharaoh. Need I go on? The Bible is full of such examples: men who took a stand for Truth and were blessed because of it. Remember those stirring words of Joshua as he stood before a rebellious people and said, "Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves whom you will serve; whether the gods your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:14,15). Joshua was not concerned with where the majority stood; he would serve the Lord. He was not worried whether he would be fellowshipped by the others; he would remain united with the Lord. We must make a similar stand – not just for the sake of making a stand, but rather for the sake of Truth.

We live in a world where many reject the existence of an absolute and unchangeable truth. Situation ethics, value clarification, and other such philosophies search to destroy the possibility for such a thing as "truth" to exist. Now more than ever we must make a stand for the absolute truth contained in God's Word.

Not long ago I was in a religious bookstore to purchase some Bibles and I overheard a discussion between two Protestant "pastors". One was accusing the other of not being "up to date" with his faith. "How can you possibly deny a woman the right to develop her leadership potential in the church? Look at her position in the

world today! We can't let the world get ahead of us, can we?"

I couldn't believe what I was hearing! But when I began to think about it, I realized some of our brethren are advocating similar ideas. Perhaps they are not as straight forward in their rhetoric, but they advocate actions that are, in principle, the same.

I am alarmed by the increasing number of good men who are willing to compromise doctrine for the sake of unity. Unity with what, with whom? Unity with the Lord should be our only concern. Let's encourage all to unify themselves with the Lord -- then we'll enjoy true unity among us. We must be willing to stand alone if need be to defend the Truth of God's Word. The *only thing* we have to offer the world is pure religion and doctrine. If we allow ourselves to be derailed from the restoration plea, we become just another of many denominations. I remember the words of Willard Collins, while talking to a group of preachers. "Remember, brethren, we preach a distinctive Gospel!" Read Hebrews 11, then the first three verses of chapter 12. Surely with all those before us who were victorious and the example of our Lord dying alone on the cross, we can make a stand for the Truth.

Truth is like a sparkling mountain stream. At its source it is pure and delightful to drink. There are few that make the journey to the fount to taste of these waters. As the stream runs down the mountain in its journey towards the sea, man's contaminants make the water impure. By the time it reaches the sea, it is deadly brine. Shall we exchange our pure fount of truth for a drink of contaminated brine just because it comes from a larger body of water? Shall we sacrifice our unity with the Savior and His pure Truth just to be able to have a larger number in our body?

What is unity? Isn't unity what Paul was pleading for in Philippians 2:2? "Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in Spirit, intent on one purpose." However, unity of the body (the church) cannot exist unless it is first united with the head, Jesus Christ. *What value has unity if Christ is not included?* You have a body decapitated by it's own members. Jesus prayed for unity the night before His death – and He gave us the key to it. "Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth. As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also send them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe through their word; that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me" (John 17:17–23). The key to unity is being sanctified in the truth. God's Word is truth. So the only true unity that can exist is that unity found in being obedient to the Word. The price "Christianity" has paid for following human creeds and doctrines and splitting into hundreds of denominations is that the world does not believe. The world will believe only through the example of those who, being sanctified in the Truth, form a true unity with God through His Son.

There have been many "ecumenical councils" that have traded doctrines and traditions like baseball cards for the sake of "unity". Shall we trade the priceless blood of Christ, shed to free us from sin and eternal death, for a handshake and a feeling of fellowship from a friend who is not willing to accept the Word in its entirety? May it never be. Let's unify ourselves with the Lord; unify others with Him; then enjoy the sameness of mind, love, spirit, and purpose. "Now may the God who gives perseverance

and encouragement grant you to be the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus; that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:5,6).

## Speaking Falsely For God

There is nothing stronger than Truth. It is eternal. All else will pass. Truth does not need our rationalization to make it stand. We must not think we are so intelligent that we can understand the mind of God completely. I, for one, believe we can explain the "why" of nearly every command of God, but it is dangerous to make God's Word subject to our limited knowledge and reasoning. We often attempt to create a God in our image instead of striving to make ourselves like Him. As a result, we may misrepresent the Truth.

Job's friends come to mind as an example. With the good intention of helping their friend, they tried to defend what they thought to be the truth. According to them, God, the just One, was repaying Job for some terrible sin he had committed. Job, certain of his innocence, found these words that his friends considered truth to be false and he lashed out, "You smear with lies; you are all worthless physicians" (Job 13:4). Then he asks, "Will you speak falsely for God, and speak deceitfully for Him?" (v.7). "Your memorable sayings are proverbs of ashes, your defenses are defenses of clay" (v.12). These men were not intentionally lying. They were certain their argument was based on God's Truth. But while attempting to speak for God, they were lying. God later told them in chapter 42, verse 7, "You have not spoken of me what is right."



We, too, can be guilty of the same sin if we are not careful to defend only what is contained in God's Word. Job's friends were defending an idea of man concerning God. They were defending a "doctrine" (the direct and immediate retribution for sin) they had made from their own reasoning. Let's base our beliefs on what is written instead of our own philosophy. Especially on the mission field it is essential that we base our arguments on solid Biblical truth. It is easy to "speak falsely for God" where there is almost total ignorance concerning His Word. A question is asked, the missionary doesn't have an answer, and rather than admit the fact that he doesn't know, he makes up an answer based on his own reasoning. We must not succumb to such a temptation. We must be willing to say, "I don't know. Give me some time to study God's Word for the answer." If we begin answering questions with our own reasoning, we become as Job said, "worthless physicians". However, if we will defend the Truth, we can heal souls eternally through Jesus Christ.

A Gospel preacher was defending the fact that we cannot use musical instruments during worship. However, he was using an argument that wasn't entirely true. When questioned about the argument's veracity he replied, "Well, it may not be true, but I haven't had a denominationalist question it yet! It really stumps 'em!"

This brother was speaking falsely for God. In that instance he was a worthless physician. Again let me state the Truth does not need our help, and it most certainly does not need the help of lies to make it stand. It stands on its own – eternally. We strive to understand it and defend it, and live it. But may we always present it in its purity, without resorting to false arguments or half-truths.

The purity of Truth is a beautiful thing. The longer I am on the mission field, the more I am convinced that the ONLY thing we have to offer the world is God's distinctive Truth. God's Word has been lied about long enough. Let's not make Biblical Truth subject to our reasoning and justification; let's make ourselves subject to God's Will!

Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31,32). Speak the Truth; defend the Truth with truth! The world is crying for freedom from its sin. The only key to their freedom is Truth. May we liberate those searching for the key!

Indeed, it is an awesome responsibility and challenge -- "Contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude 3). But if we don't, our work is in vain, for only through the Truth will we see God's face throughout all eternity. Christ is the only way and His Truth is the guide. Indeed, salvation is the greatest gift God could possibly give to man. And He has granted this salvation to us through His eternal plan revealed to us in His Word. May He always give us the courage and determination to present this message in its entirety and purity and may He give us the strength to combat every effort to contaminate it!

"Beloved, while I was making every effort to write to you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 3,4).

## Chapter VII

# TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

“Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen” (Ephesians 3:20–21). To God be the glory! The end result of anything we do should bring glory to our Creator. If we attempt to bestow honor and glory upon ourselves, our work is doomed to failure. We can’t even do half of what we think! If our attitude is to bring glory to God, He is able to do exceeding abundantly *beyond* what we ask and even think! It is sure to succeed!

## God’s Power Today

I believe in God’s active power in our World today. If I didn’t, I certainly wouldn’t be on the mission field. I do not believe His power has diminished since apostolic times. God is the same, Christ our Savior is the same, and the same Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of God’s children. Certainly the manifestation of God’s power through His Spirit has changed; He no longer intervenes miraculously. But it is important that we realize that the power is still available to us.

What would you say if I told you I didn’t believe in electricity? What if I said, “Lights are merely figments of your imagination. After all, you have never seen elec-

tricity itself nor have I." Well, if I were so ignorant, all you would have to do is connect me to 220 volts (110 would do!) and you'd make a believer out of me in a hurry!

I'm afraid there will be many a "church-going Christian" in a similar situation on judgement day. Having lived their lives believing the power of God to be nonexistent in their era, they will be shocked into the realization of its everlasting availability. How tragic – not to use that which He is so willing to provide. Those who don't believe in God's power are inactive in evangelization because they feel they must do it all. But brethren, we are not preaching a dead message! "For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). God is still alive and **POWERFUL** today through His Word!

Do you realize what His Word can do? The Pentecostals tell us we negate the power of the Spirit. Are they correct? They say we deny the fact that God can make the crippled walk and the deaf hear. They say we deny that He can make the blind to see and the dead to walk in today's world. I don't deny it, I preach it! But not in the way they want to hear it. Because I'm not talking about physical healing limited in time; I'm talking about a greater manifestation of God's power – **ETERNAL HEALING OF THE SOUL!**

God can take a man crippled in sin, and through His powerful Word, change his life and make him walk the paths of righteousness! He can take the spiritually deaf and, if they are willing, let them hear the sweet, eternal strains of salvation. He can do likewise with the spiritually

blind and can even take those spiritually dead and raise them to ETERNAL LIFE! Now, my brethren, that is power! Actually, it is the Pentecostals that tend to limit God's power. What great gift is there in physical healing when compared to living eternally with God? Where are the benefits of the physical healing done by Christ and his apostles in the first century? They have long since turned to dust. But those who believed in the name of Jesus and obeyed Him are reaping everlasting glory. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on! 'Yes,' says the spirit, 'That they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them'" (Revelation 14:13). The power that blessed those who died in the Lord during the first century also blessed us, and it will raise us to eternal life. What amazing and magnificent power!

God's power manifests itself today in the great change His Word can make in people's lives. Just a few examples from the work in Cervignano:

..... *the crippled walk*

Maria was a fervent Catholic. Being a firm believer in God's power, she had taken her paraplegic daughter to "healers" throughout Europe. Time and time again she came home with her hopes shattered. "Why doesn't God listen? What have I done to deserve this?" she often cried. Proverbs 13:12 described her life: "Hope deferred makes the heart sick." She then began to study God's Word with us. She was spiritually crippled, a problem much more serious than her daughter's physical problem. When she obeyed Christ in baptism, she said joyfully, "I knew God was listening. I now know He heard my prayers." She no longer searches for a miracle; she asks God for strength to accept her daughter's physical limitations. Now the second half of Proverbs 13:12 describes her life: "But desire fulfilled is a tree of life."

*..... the deaf hear!*

Pasqualina was a satisfied Catholic. When her sisters began to study with us, she wanted no part in such "heresy". She closed her ears to the Word. As her sisters continued to study, Pasqualina became curious. One Sunday morning she attended worship just to see what was going on. She has missed very few worship services since then and is now a sister in Christ. Though she didn't want to hear, God's powerful message penetrated into the depths of her heart and changed her life.

*..... the blind see!*

Sergio is a policeman in a nearby town. His wife was converted several years ago. At first, Sergio was very upset by her obedience and was almost hostile toward the evangelist that taught her. As a policeman who had great influence on many people, he felt he could never consider leaving his traditional faith. He was a very fervent Catholic. But after nearly a decade of patient study, Sergio was baptized into Christ! The Lord removed his spiritual blindness and gave him eternal sight through His Word.

*..... and the dead, rise to walk in newness of life!*

Leda had been an atheist for years when we met her. Once a Catholic, she had become disgusted with their hypercritical inconsistencies. She had no desire to study God's Word. After all, to her He didn't even exist. Because of a common friendship, we often talked together. The more I discussed the True and Living God with her, the more interested she became. What a tremendous change God made in her life through His Word! As I raised her from the waters of baptism, I remember thinking, "Truly this is a new birth!" In less than a year God had taken an atheist, one spiritually dead, and changed her into a fervent, zealous worker in His king-

dom. Such a change can only be attributed to His magnificent power.

There are many such examples I could give, and I'm sure you know of similar conversions. The point to all this is obvious: the Word of God is still as powerful as ever! It can and will change the hearts of men. But we have to preach it and live it for it to be effective. The Bible is worth no more than the paper it is printed on if we don't put it into practice in our lives. The power is there, but it has to be plugged in.

A friend once gave me an electric stapler. I had no idea how to use it, and there was no instruction booklet. I plugged it in and began stapling with it. I used it like any other stapler I'd ever used – I'd put the palm of my hand on it, push the papers in, and shove downward. I thought, "What a joke! There isn't any difference in this and a regular stapler. There is no power here!" I carelessly threw the next booklet that I needed to staple into the mouth and finally accidentally hit the power trigger. What a jolt of force! I'd never seen such power in a stapler! The power was there – I just didn't know how to use it.

And so it is with God's Word. What tremendous power it contains! But there are few who ever trigger it! They hear of the power of God and think it's a thing of the past. They never attempt to use the Word to change their neighbor's life because he drinks beer and curses God. Since they don't believe the Word is powerful, they don't give it a chance. And the man dies without the Lord, never having heard the Gospel his next-door neighbor believed in. But really, though, he should have seen the power of God through his believing neighbor's example! Today the

power of God is manifested through our good works – our everyday lives.

When God wanted to fully reveal His message to man, how did He do it? When He was ready to make His mystery known to mankind, how did He communicate it? Did He send a prophet with the message? No, He had done that countless times before. Men did not listen. So God, in His infinite wisdom, revealed His Word is a new and marvelous way – His Word became flesh (John 1:14). It became one of us, it dwelt among us. And Christ left us an example (I Peter 2:21) that we might follow Him.

If we want to manifest the power of God today, then we must allow it to become flesh in our lives. Though we cannot live a perfect life as our Savior did, we can continually strive toward that goal. And people will see our example, they will glorify God (Matthew 5:16), and they will see His power alive in us!

Just think about it for a moment. What greater show of God's power is there than when a sinner obeys His will and changes his life to conform to God's commands? What greater manifestation of His power could there be than the changing of a hideous, sinful enemy of God into His beloved child? The fact that God loves a rebellious, sinful, disgusting man enough to give him the opportunity to be His child is something I cannot fathom. He washed away my sins, remembers them no more, and sent His *only son* to pay the price of this great salvation. What *powerful* and *endless love!*

“For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own



love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Romans 5:6–11).

*Our reconciliation to God is a true manifestation of His power! And this power is still alive today! May we live in such a way that others will see it in us and want to follow our example. May God grant us the strength to allow His will to become flesh in our lives! To Him be the glory!*

## The Laws Of Spiritual Motion

While considering God’s power available to us, let’s look at some practical applications of it. If you’ve studied the sciences, you will remember the laws of motion given to us by Sir Isaac Newton:

1. Every particle continues in a state of rest or motion with constant speed in a straight line unless compelled by force to change that state.
2. The net unbalance force producing a change of motion is equal to the product of the mass and the acceleration of the particle.
3. All forces arise from interaction of particles and in every such interaction the force exerted on the one particle by the second is equal and opposite to the force

exerted by the second on the first. Action and reaction are equal and opposite.

You may wonder what the point of all of this is. Let me propose three spiritual laws of motion that are equally true and somewhat similar:

1. Every soul without Christ will continue in its eternally lost state unless compelled by the power of God's salvation (through His Word) to leave that state.

It is interesting to note that the physical law says a particle must be *compelled* to change. We need to do more compelling spiritually! A person does not obey God by passive action. It is a decision that requires thought and courage. It is the most important decision one can make. We must compel the lost to obey their Lord. Do we really believe our non-christian friends are perishing? Do we really believe our Savior's words in John 14:6? "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through me." Do we believe that all have sinned (Romans 3:23), and that the wages of sin are death? (Romans 6:23) If we believe these things, then we will do everything possible to compel those around us to change their state. We are the ones who must do something. We have the Gospel, the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). The action must start with us if we want to change the heart of men. A wilful effort must be made on our part to save those around us, or they will continue on a straight path toward everlasting darkness. The Lord said, "Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in" (Luke 14:23).

Have you ever wondered why the first century church grew so rapidly? Beginning on the day of Pentecost somewhere around 33 A.D. in Jerusalem, we see an explosion of

growth through Judea and all of Palestine. Spreading like a wild fire around the Mediterranean, we find churches in Antioch, Lystra, Derby, Iconium, Ephesus, and many other cities. In Acts 21:20, Paul reports the growth of the church in myriads -- literally *tens* of thousands! In trying to understand the reason for such phenomenal growth, some have reasoned it was because of the miracles that were being performed; others attribute the growth to the belief that the Lord would return in those days. I believe it can be explained in the fact that the first century Christians were convicted believers in Jesus as the *only* Savior. And they were individually compelling their friends to obey Him. They were constantly being taught and teaching that Jesus is the Christ, that eternal salvation could only be found through obedience to Him. It was the most important fact in their lives.

My brother, don't let Satan quench the incentive that compels you to teach God's Word to a dying world. Don't let him rationalize away the need for you to present Christ to your friends. Remember, the first spiritual law of motion states that a soul will remain lost without Christ unless you compel him to change his course. And with the active and living power in God's Word today, Christ can change the heart of any man. To God be the glory!

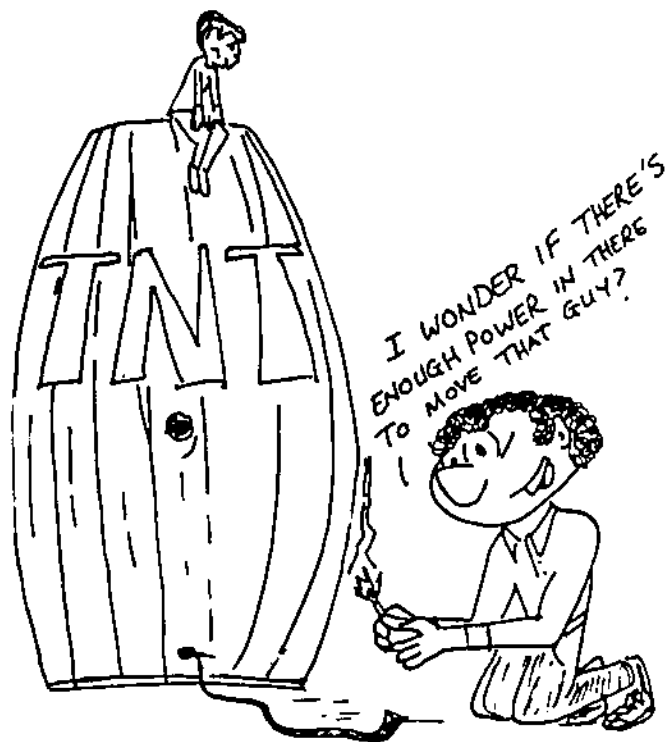
2. Great power is required to change the eternal destiny of a soul, and it is amply provided to us through the Word of God.

We've already looked at this point, but I want to make sure we are convinced of God's power available to us through His Word even today. I believe one of the greatest hindrances to our personal work programs, visitation programs, or just any teaching opportunity is our *fear of failure*. Why do we have such fear? Because we feel we are

alone! It's like going to war against a tank when all you have is a sling-shot. But the truth is, we have the POWER that created the universe on our side. We have God's Word with us (it is eternal), Jesus at our side (remember His promise, "And, lo, I am with you always"), so we have nothing to fear. Those beautiful words of David from Psalm 23 come to mind: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil;" Why, David? "For Thou art with me." It is not right that we should fear.

"For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline" (II Timothy 1:7). We are born to the power of God's love, and His love is so powerful that, if man allows it to enter into his heart, it will make him a child of God through obedience to His perfect will. But we have to teach it for it to enter the heart of men. Not every man will obey. But it is not because of a lack of power in the Word – it is because some will choose the riches of the world over the riches of eternal life with God.

Paul said, "And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God." Granted, Paul was referring to the supernatural manifestations of the Spirit, and we believe in them because they are recorded in His Word. But our faith can also rest on the power of God shown in our world today. The more we teach the Word and see the change it makes in men's lives, the more we are convinced of the magnitude of God's power. One who never tries to use God's power unto salvation cannot have a strong faith in Him.



A man in a certain Italian village was known as the worst of the town drunks. It is said that he was sober in the mornings only long enough to make it to his favorite tavern. He would use God's name in vain to the point that people closed their shutters as he staggered by so they wouldn't hear his terrible language. He mistreated little children if they dared to cross his path. Is this man one you would consider a "candidate" for salvation? While visiting an aunt in the hospital, he heard an evangelist offer a prayer at her bedside.

That tough, mean, evil heart was touched by the sincerity of the prayer. He followed the preacher to the parking lot and asked him if he would say a prayer for him. From that day until his death, that man was a changed person. He no longer staggered through the streets or cursed. And the same children who had run from him before now played with him and called him "nonno" or grandpa. He died a child of God.

Our faith just has to grow at such a wonderful, awesome display of power. Yes, it takes a great amount of power to change men's hearts, but God abundantly provides it through His love found in the Gospel. To Him be the glory!

3. The third law of spiritual motion is different from its counterpart. The physical law states that every action and reaction are equal and opposite. The spiritual law states, "For every action that we initiate for the Lord, there is a tremendously unequal reaction in our aid from Him."

If we'll do a little, he'll do the rest. If we'll plant the seed and water it, He will cause it to grow and will provide the harvest. We continually underestimate how much He is able to do. We calculate our work according to our own capabilities, and forget He has promised to bless our efforts for Him. Remember, He is able to do "exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3: 20). Working in Italy has allowed me to see this very clearly. He has blessed our every effort and provided some tremendous opportunities as a result. The more we try, the more He blesses us; the more we give, the more He provides.

Joshua makes an amazing statement in Joshua 23:14.

After 80 years of battle and hardships he says to his people: "You know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the Lord your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed." God will not fail us. His promise to be with us and bless us is sure. "My God shall supply your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). God is faithful to do His part, but for there to be a reaction, there must first be an action – and that is *our* responsibility. He can only bless us in our efforts to the extent that we are active in teaching His Word. Let us gather courage and march ahead into battle. He is ever near us and will cause us to win. To Him be the glory!

## CONCLUSION

I hope in some way to have helped and encouraged you to consider being a missionary for our Lord. The Lord is not looking for any certain type of man. He's looking for a sincere, dedicated Christian that will use his given talents to preach the Word. Let's prepare ourselves in the knowledge of God's Eternal Truth and GO! He is sure to bless us if we will do His Will and work with the correct attitude toward ourselves and our work. If we want to succeed in the sight of the Lord, Jesus gives us a failsafe framework for all that we do in Matthew 5:16: "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." May we work in such a way that God will receive the glory. Let His love shine through us as we each say, "Follow me as I strive to follow Christ."

I have been asked often, "What do you think you can do against the Catholic church?" I have a quick answer for that one – "nothing!" What have I done in Cervignano the past five years? "Nothing!" And that's the good news. I am just one. With Gary, that makes two, and that "ain't" a whole lot. But the Lord has done great things in Cervignano, Italy, and I thank Him daily that he has allowed us to be His instruments. I can do nothing against catholicism, against atheistic communism, the "Jehovah Witnesses", false teachers, or any enemy of the Gospel. But God can defeat them all. And He provides me with the power to do likewise in Him.

"You are from God, little children, and have overcome them," (I John 4:4). You don't have to be a Paul or a Silas;



you just have to be yourself in Christ. Or, rather, Christ must be in you. We are insignificant and weak, but with the Lord at our side, we are more than conquerors! God can and will use us and our talents (whatever they may be). He will give us the victory if we will surrender ourselves to Him.

I recently watched a soccer game where a group of young amateurs tore apart an all-star team made up of professional players. The youngsters played as a team: each individual gave up his identity and personal glory. They played with unquenchable enthusiasm. They carefully followed the instructions of their coach. The professionals relied on themselves, each hardly aware of his teammates around him. They sought individual glory. They were above receiving instructions from their coach. They lost.

Likewise, professionalism in the church, especially in mission work, will surely defeat the mission we are trying to accomplish. The Lord doesn't need "big name missionaries" striving to uphold their well-publicized methods of work. He has limited use for men who insist on working alone without heeding the advice and help of the national workers. He doesn't need "professionals" who put themselves above the body. He needs you and me as we are – "amateurs", willing to give ourselves totally to His service without regard to personal glory, willing to give Him all the credit, willing to work openly with all those around us for the growth of the body.

Maria Speranza Tantin attended our first Gospel meeting in Cervignano. She came to ridicule what she considered to be just another Protestant denomination. She had been immersed for the remission of her sins in 1945 after studying the Bible on her own. She began her search for the church. After searching nearly 35 years

and frequenting the worship services of nearly 20 different groups, she had concluded that the Lord's church no longer existed on the face of the earth. But after studying together, we found our understanding of the Scriptures to be very similar, and we accepted her as a sister in Christ. Five months after our first contact with her, she missed her first worship service. Knowing she must be ill, I visited her that afternoon. Maria was dying. With a trembling voice and a grateful heart, she held my hand and tearfully whispered, "I've found the church. I'm so happy I found the church!" The next day I lifted my voice in front of the many attending her funeral and said, "My friends, Maria is not dead. Her tired and weary body is laid to rest, but Maria is with her Lord."

Sometimes I ask myself, "Is it worth it?" My mind wanders down a country lane to a little cemetery just outside of Cervignano, where there is a small marker bearing the name of Maria Speranza Tantin. To the world, there lies the body of a poor, insignificant woman. To me, it is the sign of a great victory – a soul who will enjoy eternal glory with the Lord. Yes, it is worth it: every minute, every effort, every dollar, every heartache. The Lord is near. To Him be the glory!

"Come, Lord Jesus."

## Appendix I

# FROM MY WIFE'S POINT OF VIEW

Rebecca Nance Lavender

Now let's take a look at missions from the feminine viewpoint. I confess that I felt entirely out of my league and at a loss for what to say when Earl first asked me to write my thoughts on the woman's part in mission work. Then he suggested that I write as if I were talking to a friend who is preparing to go to the mission field. (Earl is a wise man, and knows I'm *never* at a loss for words when talking to a friend!). I'll be the first to admit that I can claim no particular expertise on the subject. Yet it is my hope that sharing my experiences friend-to-friend, sister-to-sister, may be of some use to you.

Just as every couple has a "First Date", so every couple on the mission field has a "First Day". This is that fateful, decisive day they begin seriously considering work in a foreign country. And just as emotions on "First Dates" vary from repulsion to love-at-first-sight, I'm sure there is also a wide range of emotions involved in "First Days". In the paragraphs that follow, these emotions will be generalized and narrowed down in hope of better understanding our feelings on this topic and coming to terms with them.

Incidentally, if you've read the preceding chapters, you will notice that Earl and I are expressing practically the

same thoughts. Even though we each wrote independently of the other, the common experience we've had translated into similar opinions. I hope the repetition isn't too boring!

Now let's suppose your husband hurries into the house one day after work. You can tell by the gleam in his eye that he's excited. He offers you a chair, and sits down himself. Then he begins.

"Honey," he says, "I've been seriously considering us spending the next several years of our lives on the mission field. It's something I've always felt I would like to do, and this is as good a time to start as any."

What would be your response?

1. "No way! Go if you like, but count me out!"
2. "Have you considered what you are asking me to give up? How do you expect me to be happy without my washing machine and dishwasher, not to mention my family, ladies' class, Thursday morning workdays in the clothing room, and our visitation team's fellowship dinners? You know how important those things are to me!"
3. "Why do you want to do that? You're doing a great job with your church work here. There are plenty of guys who can't do what you're doing. Let them go."
- 4a. "Let's wait till after we get our family started. I can't imagine having a baby born in some foreign hospital – if they even have them there!"
- 4b. "We've worked hard towards our retirement, and now it's almost here. Besides, I can't stand to think of not seeing the grandchildren as they grow up, and our parents may need our help some day soon. There are plenty of energetic young people who can go."

5. "Give me some time to think it over. If it is what you really want and think it is best for us, I'll try to adapt. But frankly, I can't picture myself as a missionary's wife."

Each of these arguments reveals a flaw in our basic concept of "missionaries". And to be perfectly honest, each expresses a sentiment I felt myself to some degree when we first began talking about working in Italy.

But I have gradually come to the realization that "missionaries" are really just ordinary people. The negative aspects of mission work have been presented for so long that we have begun to believe one must be a special breed to want to endure all those hardships. Before our work in Italy, I pictured a missionary as a "super-saint", as one who is somehow better than the rest of us. I also thought of a misfit who wears clothes at least a decade old and can converse only on the topic of mission work. I hope we can erase this mistaken image!

It's time someone revealed the secret: mission work can be tremendously gratifying. More than that, it can be fun! And missionaries can be normal Christians – Christians who feel confidence and joy through their relationship with Jesus and want to share it with others.

I have found the following to be true in response to my previous arguments for not going to the mission field:

1. THE "NO WAY" ARGUMENT ; I never really meant this (or said it), but it felt good to think it for a few seconds, anyway.

2. TOO MUCH TO GIVE UP ; True, there are some conveniences you temporarily give up, some relationships that must endure a long-distance connection. But the new

friends and brothers and sisters you find more than compensate. Besides, just think how much Christ gave up in order to come to earth to die for us. Surely not having a dishwasher for a few years is not too big a sacrifice to make.

3. **YOU ARE NEEDED HERE** : Mission work is a huge challenge. We need to be sending out more – not less -- talented people.

4a. **WAIT TILL AFTER WE HAVE CHILDREN** : Foreign hospitals may be a little different from American ones, but they still staff doctors perfectly capable of delivering a baby.

4b. **WAIT TILL THE CHILDREN ARE GROWN** : What better intellectual stimulation can you give your child than to grow up speaking two languages, with the benefit of choosing the best from two cultures?

4c. **WE'RE TOO OLD** : This is one argument I have not had to resolve yet. But when the time comes, I guess I will nag a lot for pictures, tapes, and movies of the grandbabies. And I will thoroughly enjoy the time I do get to spend with them.

5. **I'M NOT THE TYPE** : This was probably my biggest objection to mission work. And I still cannot picture myself as a “missionary’s wife”, as I used to perceive the role. But in reality, my life in Italy has not been all that different from life in Tennessee. And of course, my personality hasn’t undergone any drastic change. I’m still the same “type” person I’ve always been.

Obviously, this discussion of emotions is not conclusive. I included it to point out that all of us will have certain obstacles to overcome, both physical and emotional. As with life anywhere, there have been good times and bad

for us. Yet each new experience has brought with it fresh understanding of God's love and His power. I am just beginning to understand Paul's declaration in Philippians 4: 11-13.

Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

I believe it starts with attitude, and achieving Paul's attitude would certainly be a worthy goal for us. Notice that he says he has *learned* to be content. It wasn't an in-born trait in Paul's personality — he made a concentrated effort to learn contentment. May we also learn to be happy. Also, he learned to be content *in whatever circumstance he found himself*, not just on sunny days when things were going his way. May we discipline ourselves to be content with or without a dishwasher; with or without the family, or the ladies' class, or the family pediatrician.

When I was growing up, my mother used to tell me, "Happiness comes from within." I've remembered that statement often in recent years. True happiness is not the product of physical comforts. True happiness is the realization that we are children of God, that we have been redeemed by the sacrificial blood of His Son, and that some day, this world and all that pertains to it will pass away, and we will live eternally with our Lord and Creator.

"I can do all things ..." But I can do it, not because I am self-sufficient, but because it is Christ who works through me. The apostles were a fairly normal group of

men. They feared and they failed. But with Jesus' help, they had the necessary confidence to carry the Gospel to all the world. "And lo, I am with you always," applies to us, too.

Let us not be like the man in the parable of the talents (Luke 19:11–26). He was afraid to use the talent he had been given, and it was taken from him. Let us forget our past failures, forget what we cannot do, and concentrate on that which we *can* do in Christ. Again, Paul sums it up nicely in Philippians 3:12–14.

Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Up to now I have attempted to communicate two main points. First of all, a missionary and his wife do not have to be different type people who wear weird clothes and long-suffering expressions. Any stable, mature Christian who has a desire to share the Gospel of Jesus is a logical candidate. Secondly, the emphasis should not be on what *we* can do, but on what Christ has already done, and what *He can do* through us. The weight of the world is not on our shoulders. We don't have to save the world; Christ has already done that. We are merely the joyful and willing bearers of the Good News!

The rest of this chapter is divided into two parts. Part one will discuss some vital attitudes for the wife to develop before the couple ever leaves the States. Part two will deal



more specifically with some ideas and approaches to use once the couple is established in their new home.

There are several attitudes that should be cultivated before leaving for the mission field. I feel each of these are vitally important, not because I thought them up, but because they are principles set forth in the Bible. I have seen much time and money wasted by people for years laboring in vain because they didn't have the right attitude. Let's make up our minds now to discover the proper, Biblical attitude, and then work diligently to shape ourselves accordingly.

## Count It A Privilege

Let's count it a privilege to be able to share Christ with others, not a sacrifice. Acting the martyr may win some sympathy from friends and family at home, but it will do little to win hearts to Jesus. Besides, considering that we have been offered a magnificent gift – the way of salvation – isn't it really just perfectly normal that we should want to tell others about it? When I receive some good news in a letter, do you know what is the first thing I do? First, I tell Earl about it. (We're usually finishing our lunch when I read the mail). Then as soon as lunch is over, I call my friend Amy and share the news with her, and with other friends I think may be interested. We should be just as motivated and eager to relate the joyful news of our salvation in Jesus.

There are a couple of verses in II Corinthians (9:6,7) that were written to instruct us in giving of our financial means, but I believe the same principle may be applied to giving of our time.

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly. And he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully.

Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart ;not grudgingly or under compulsion ; for God loves a cheerful giver.

In the same spirit, let us teach about Christ, not grudgingly or because we feel we *must*. Let's be thankful for every opportunity to give, for God loves a cheerful giver.

The immediate rewards of mission work are great. It truly is a privilege to be able to watch the progress of our friends week by week as they come to a greater understanding of God's love for them. It is uplifting to experience their joy when they finally decide to accept Jesus as their Savior through baptism. It is satisfying to be able to encourage them and be encouraged by them as they, in turn, begin to teach others. It truly is a privilege!

## Put Aside Americanism

If we hope to be effective teachers, we cannot afford to build a racist barrier around ourselves. Our mission is to spread christianity, not Americanism. Here again we're talking about attitude. I do not believe one must change her dress, her recipes, or her pastimes and become totally "native" in order to be an effective worker on the mission field. However, enthusiasm for your new culture goes a long way in making new friends willing to listen to your point of view on more important, spiritual matters. Be willing to enjoy the local cuisine and traditions, even if you choose not to use them daily.

One of the best ways to compliment the people is to learn their language. It is just as important for the wife to be able to communicate as for the husband. Obviously, one cannot be a friend or have much influence if one cannot communicate.

Avoid criticizing the country and its people. At first I had the tendency to blame everything that went wrong for us on our new country. How shocked I was on our first trip back to the States when I realized that things go wrong in America too! And Americans can be just as rude as Italians or people anywhere else. In every country there are good characteristics and bad – there are good people and bad. So let's concentrate on the *good* aspects of our new culture and minimize the bad.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female ;for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

Put aside your American citizenship and put on Christ. There is neither Italian nor American nor Chinese nor Polish; for we are all one in Christ Jesus.

## No Room For Holier-Than-Thou

There is never any place for a "holier-than-thou" attitude in the church, but bad attitudes such as this seems to amplify on the mission field and do double damage. New friends and sisters in Christ are going to be weak. They have a lot to learn yet about living as Christ lived, and they will fail at times. But let's remember that we too are fallible. Our attitude should not be "let me teach you what I know," but rather "let's study God's Word together and

grow together in faith and love.” The apostle John beautifully describes this attitude:

A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 13:34, 35

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

I John 3:18

After all, new converts are actually “babes in Christ”. They need lots of love and nurturing and encouragement. Can you imagine the effectiveness of a mother with this attitude? “I’ve already shown Laura what she need to do to be able to write her name. The rest is up to her. If she can’t do it now, it certainly isn’t my fault!”

No, the mother would very patiently show little Laura how to write her name day after day, week after week until she mastered the art. She might work on it with her daughter, taking her little hand in hers and writing it with her at first. Then she might lightly write the letters and let Laura trace them. Finally after much practice Laura could write her name all alone. But even then she might occasionally get confused and make the “L” backwards or leave out the “u”. In this case, a good mother would gently remind and re-teach.

The parallel is clear, is it not? Christianity is so complex. And it is drastically different from the ways of the world. It really is not reasonable to expect a new convert to achieve the degree of maturity in a couple of years that we

have developed over a couple of decades or more. And I for one still have plenty to learn! So let's concentrate on setting a good example; and encourage them; and show love by our deeds, because He first loved us.

Once we are settled in our new city, then what do we do? Just as it does not require a "missionary personality" to do mission work, neither must we change our life-style drastically once we have arrived on the mission field. I think it is vitally important that we women keep sight of our priorities. And our priorities should be more or less just the same on the mission field as they should be wherever we may live.

## God First

God must be the center of our lives. We need to keep our own spiritual tanks full in order to be helpful to others. We need to make time to study, pray, and meditate.

The wife's schedule on the mission field may be tighter than ever with no pre-prepared dinners or baby food, no dishwasher or clothes dryer. Setting aside an hour a day for personal study may well be a physical impossibility. But instead of giving up completely, let us look for ways to make the best use of our time. Prayers said while hanging diapers out on the clothes line are just as effective as those said with head bowed and eyes closed. One of my favorite times to sing praises is while I wash the dishes. (I picked up this idea from my mother-in-law). Other household necessities such as making the beds, sweeping the floors, and cleaning the bathroom occupy our hands, but not our minds. Why not train ourselves to utilize such

times for meditating on Bible verses or planning ways to help others who need our encouragement?

I agree that periods of concentrated study are also necessary. Hopefully we can schedule at least a short period of time each day for searching the Scriptures. So let's stop feeling guilty over what we can't do, and get busy making the best use of what time we have!

## Husband

A husband on the mission field needs all the encouragement you can give him. He not only has to adjust to a new culture, a new home, and new friends as you do; he must also adjust to a new job. When we came to Italy, Earl left behind our elders, his father, my father, his brothers, and some trusted friends. Before our move, he had depended on all of them from time to time for feed-back and encouragement. More than ever before he needed me as a best friend and a sympathetic listener. Never before had my words carried such weight, so I had to learn to choose them carefully. Heart-felt compliments are of vast importance. Criticism should be measured out cautiously and served up with lots of sensitivity and love and prayer. Being judgemental or critical serves only to demoralize and isolate our husbands from us, so let's rid ourselves of these bad habits now!

## Children

We parents need to remind ourselves constantly that our children have souls too – souls that need to be shown

God's love and taught His plan for our salvation. The Israelites were instructed as such in Deuteronomy 6:6,7.

And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart;  
and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.

Our children first come to see and understand the love of God through the love which we show them. To nurture children in love and diligently teach them the commandments of God require great amounts of time. It is of utmost importance that we be available when they need us most. It is one of our very most important responsibilities as a Christian.

Given this critical time factor involved in training up children, a mother with young children will obviously be more limited in her activities outside the home than a woman who has no young children to care for. But mothers, don't drown in guilt! The apostle Paul assures us that caring for the needs of our husbands and children is an *important part* of our lives as Christians. It is not something we squeeze in somewhere before or after our "church work".

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored.

Titus 2:3-5

I have known of too many fine Christian women who had guilt complexes because they had little time for formal evangelism after their family's needs were met. The Christian characteristic (of the fruit of the spirit, as these characteristics are called in Galatians 5:22,23), are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self-control. Notice that evangelistic fervor is not listed. Naturally if we truly have joy and peace in Christ Jesus and love our fellowman as we should, we will want to help others find the source of these blessings. But we are no less a Christian if our responsibilities in the home prevent us from attending every women's workshop or weekend retreat.

I am honoring God's Word when I keep our home orderly and organized to enhance my husband's peace of mind. I am serving Him as I cook nourishing meals and provide for the spiritual, physical, and emotional needs of our children. I can even teach my children the joy of being a Christian as I change a diaper, listen to a story, or kiss away a hurt. Don't fret over ways you cannot serve because of your children. *Learn to be content* glorifying Christ as a Christian wife and mother.

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men;

knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

Colossians 3:23, 24

Whether, then you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

I Corinthians 10:31

After our first three priorities – God, husband, and children – are in order, we will be ready to branch out and do what we can in reaching others. From the woman's



position, how can this best be accomplished? If you have not guessed it already, I'll clue you in now that I'm a strong advocate of the "normal life missionary wife". I question neither the motives nor the results of the woman who chooses to leave her home with a maid while she evangelizes at her husband's side. But will the women she is trying to reach be able to relate to this style of Christianity? I have nothing against a missionary wife taking an active part in the teaching process in any Biblical way as long as those top three priorities are first being met; as long as she is being a good example of Christian womanhood as described in Titus 2:3-5.

## Example

Keeping these ideas in mind, I'd like for us to consider a moment the importance of our examples.

Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 5:16

If Christ is the center of our lives as he should be, our happiness and confidence in Him will provoke those around us to ask, "What is it in her life that enables her to do with joy the same chores I consider drudgery?" Many times I've heard the saying, "You may be the first Bible some people have ever read." I have found this to be very true. If we present Christianity as an obligation or a burden to be endured, why would anyone ever have the desire to find out more about it? On the other hand, if our friends can see the joy that comes from putting on Christ as our Savior, they may well want to follow us as we fol-

low Christ. Paul's admonition in Colossians 4 (verses 4 and 5) is particularly applicable here.

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.

Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.

Using your natural instincts and interests, be constantly on the look-out for opportunities to get to know others and show them the wonderful privileges that come with christianity.

## Talents And Interests

I feel that it's important we use our own God-given talents and personalities as we reach out to others. Please read I Corinthians 12:14-27 with me.

For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.

And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.

If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

But now God has placed the members, each one of them in the body, just as He desired.

And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body, which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our unseemly members come to have more abundant seemliness, where our seemly members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.

And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

Now you are Christ's body, and individually member of it.

It is not only futile to mold ourselves into some pre-conceived personality; it is unscriptural! Make friends using the talents and interest that God has given you. Your talents may be petit-point or piano, baking or badminton. Even your knowledge of the English language can be used as a starting point — a common denominator — in a friendship. If you have school children, make a special effort to get to know some of the other mothers or the teachers. Or if you have no children, you might consider joining a fitness or sewing club (or whatever suits your interests) to make friends and "let your light shine." Don't hide your light under the bushel of your own home. Invite a neighbor in for coffee. Look for opportunities. Then, as God presents them, use them to the fullest for Him.

Be willing to share all aspects of your life with your new

friends. This will enable them to perceive Christianity as the sensible, all-encompassing way of life that it is – not as just a different religion. Paul put it this way in I Corinthians 9:22:

To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak;  
I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some.

## Hospitality

Another approach I recommend in teaching others is to invite them into your home. Again I am confident in suggesting hospitality, not just because it works for Earl and me, but because it is a Biblical principle. There are three benefits that I can see of having friends into your home.

First, in trying to teach others, there is no substitute for really getting to know them. After we understand something of a person's past, we are much better equipped to understand their point of view. And in knowing their point of view, we will know how best to reveal God's word to fill their individual needs. Learn to understand the culture in general, then specifically, the feelings of each individual. Show people the love you have for them as a result of the love Christ has shown us. How better to accomplish this than around the dessert table or over an after-dinner coffee?

The second advantage of having friends in your home is the influence your family can be. In these days of feminism, I think it's important that we show by example that a woman can find fulfillment in the home if Christ is the center of her life. Also, almost everyone who has been a

guest in our home in Italy has remarked on Earl's willingness and (sometimes) eagerness to do his part with the children and the chores. This is a tremendous opportunity to introduce God's plan for the family. I whole-heartedly believe it is best to teach first by example. For our example to be effective, it must first be seen. Having friends in your home is a great way to let them see a Christian family in action.

Thirdly, but certainly no less important, our homes can be used to extend hospitality to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Christian fellowship is always important. But in areas where the church is small and members few, it has even greater importance. Sharing our homes with fellow Christians can strengthen us as well as them.

Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

I Peter 4:9

## Teaching

The last area I would like to mention in which a woman can serve on the mission field is by teaching. A good part of this chapter has been dedicated to the idea of teaching by example. While our example to others is very important, it is not the only means by which we can teach.

Some of my best memories in Italy are of studies with individuals in which Earl and I were able to work together to present them the Good Tidings of Jesus. In addition to an occasional joint study with Earl, I personally had a round of visits I made to the homes of interested friends and sisters in Christ. Though the visits were primarily

social calls, more often than not the discussion would turn to spiritual matters. While discussing everyday problems, it was quite natural to suggest Christ's answers to them, showing how relevant christianity is. I felt a tremendous satisfaction in being able to share Christ and His love for us with those women whom I had grown to love.

After our first three years in Cervignano, Italy, we had a group of about ten young-to-middle-aged women and began a ladies' class. When we started the class, I was the only volunteer for the discussion leader. Without doubt, I learned more than anyone else in the group! I really had to study to keep up with them, especially taking into consideration my imperfect language skills. But it was definitely a valuable experience for us all. Gradually, other sisters in the class got the confidence up enough to offer to take a turn as discussion leader, which is an ideal situation in my opinion.

We women are needed to teach children's classes regardless of the country in which the congregation is located. In the beginning of our stay in Italy, our oldest daughter Rachel, then one year old, was my only student. As the church grew, so did the children's class. After a couple of years we divided the class into pre-school, which I taught, and primary, which Amy Witcher taught. It is truly a joy and a privilege to teach young hearts of God's love and will for their lives.

It has not been my purpose to explore every means or method in which a woman may serve on the mission field. I had no intention of deliberately slighting any area which may not have been mentioned. Nor have I tried to outline specific approaches used in Cervignano because every situation will differ some. What worked here may not be appropriate for another country or even a different city in

Italy. I have simply tried to share some general attitudes set forth in the Bible which I have come to understand more clearly through our years of work in Italy. I want to close with a quote that has inspired me many times in recent years. These words are from a missionary with far more experience and wisdom than I'll ever have.

And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience ;

bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against any one ; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body ; and be thankful.

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

Colossians 3:12-17

## Appendix II

# METHODS OF WORK USED IN CERVIGNANO

I include this in my writing with the hope that it will stimulate your thinking toward possible ways of announcing the Good News. The following methods are certainly not original, and I claim no credit for them. I believe the Lord blesses our every initiative for Him, therefore, the more we work, the more fruit we will harvest. I encourage you to use your God-given imagination to teach the Word in any scriptural way. Remember, however, that no "method" can take the place of individual friendships. A friend is the easiest person to teach about Christ.

1. *Radio*: A means to reach the masses without intruding. Door-to-door evangelism does not work in Italy because other groups constantly use it. Italians consider it an invasion of their privacy. However, with the radio, THEY turn it on, and you are immediately in their home. We have a weekly half-hour program on the largest FM station in our area. It was recently voted the most popular FM station in the nation. Our program consists of Gospel singing, and invitation to our worship services and studies, as well as a main message. We provide very positive teaching from the Bible, avoiding "talking down" other beliefs. We have found this to be much more effective than negative teaching. In fact, we have found negative (anti-Catholic) teaching to be counter-productive. All spoken voices on the program are native Italian, which helps the pro-



gram's credibility. Several members contribute to the program by recording messages. We are fortunate to have free broadcasting time, and eventual expenses are paid by the congregation. The results have been very encouraging. Though we do not receive a great amount of direct response (mail, phone calls, et cetera), many have mentioned that they regularly hear the program. It has greatly helped our acceptance in the community. We hope to eventually expand our broadcasting throughout our region of Italy. As a result of this successful program, we aided the congregation of Forli, Italy, in starting a similar work. We will soon be helping the church in Bologna in the same way. We have a professional recording studio in our building that we make available to any brethren interested in doing a similar work.

2. *The Bible Display*: Every year the congregation chooses a major work of evangelization. One such work is the Bible display. It is an exposition of the Bible – hopefully leading those who view it to study God's Word. The main body is made up of 10 interlocking panels (4' x 6'). It includes a slide presentation of the Gospel, a movie of archeological discoveries that prove the geographical and historical accuracy of the Bible, a world map that illuminates John 3:16 in 42 languages when the correct language name is selected on the keyboard, copies of objects and coins found in the Bible, an explanation of how the Bible has arrived to us from the manuscripts and many other such displays. It is designed to fit into a VW bus, and is available to any faithful congregation in Italy. In one city where it was recently displayed, it attracted over 800 people in a week's time. We have prepared and published a booklet that accompanies the display. It has been translated into 5 languages to encourage brethren in other language groups to do a similar work.

3. *Children's Bible Hour*: Every Wednesday afternoon

we invite children from our neighborhood to study God's Word with us. We use puppets, flannel boards, games, and many other means to communicate the Bible message to these children. This has been a highly successful work despite direct (and rather harsh) opposition from the Catholic church. Many children are mistreated in their obligatory religion classes as a result of attending our Bible study, but they keep coming anyway! Every week they pour out of the building singing "Gesù Mi Ama" (Jesus Loves Me) after our study together.

4. *Project Italy*: A summer campaign group led for many years by David Lavender, my father. It continues under the leadership of Ben O'Neal and the elders of the Reynoldsburg, Ohio congregation. Besides the direct benefits of having such a group work with the congregation here (such as distribution of Bible material, singing publicly and other works), they are a tremendous boost to the local Christians. They provide enough enthusiasm to last a year! It was while working in this group that I found my interest in mission work. Many other young men have returned to the field to work as a result of participating in this group. The work in Cervignano began with a summer campaign (Project Italy '79) which ended in a three night meeting. We owe much to those who have made this work possible throughout the years.

5. *Gospel Meetings*: Though I mentioned above that our work began with a meeting, Gospel Meetings are for the most part, ineffective in Italy today. It is very difficult to get an Italian to leave his home in the evenings to attend such an activity. However, we still use meetings to encourage and build up our members and closest contacts.

6. *Window Display*: Our building is located very close to the center of town. Several hundred people pass by every

day. One of our best means of preaching the Gospel is through our window display. We take care in preparing attractive material for the window display and change it at regular intervals. We store all materials used and keep a file of the available charts, etc. for future use.

*7. Teaching English Using the Bible:* There are many throughout the world who use this method of teaching. We advertise a free course in the study of the English language, using the Bible as a text. Hopefully, once one begins studying the language through Bible reading, his interest will increase in God's Word.

*8. A Bible Institute by Correspondence:* This idea is still being developed, but we feel it will be a very useful tool in our future work. It begins with an introductory course of 8 lessons. This course centers on getting acquainted with the Bible. At the completion of this course, the student qualifies for a series of studies on several basic topics, such as scientific evidences of the divine inspiration of the scriptures, the evidences of the existence of God, basic Bible studies, etc. The student is free to choose these subjects as he desires, but must finish at least four of these "series 100" lessons to qualify for a more difficult series. The institute will eventually offer up to "series 400" courses which will include difficult studies in such things as introductory Greek. All lessons (eventually over 100) are in outline form and are presented in a standard size. After completion of the introductory course, the student is presented with an attractive folder to hold the lessons. After the completion of a certain number of studies, he is presented with another, allowing him the possibility to form a library of studies. This material will also be made available to all congregations for Bible studies.

There are many other methods we could mention, but

I hope these will suffice in giving you an idea of what can be done. If a certain method does not work, don't waste time with it - TRY ANOTHER! Try to use the culture in your place of work to your advantage. Our Bible Display grew out of a present interest in Italy of the Bible as a book. For the first time in Italy's history, it's becoming a best-seller. Using this general interest we have been able to lead several to a serious study of God's Word.

Do not limit the Gospel to methods used in the past that might be ineffective in today's world. Technical discoveries have given a whole new area to experiment with in the teaching of the Good News. We need workers willing to use their talents and intelligence in developing new ways to reach the lost.

But remember, nothing will take the place of individual teaching. Though the masses must be reached with God's Word, so must your friends. That's the best place to start teaching the Truth that sets man free.

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