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HYPOCRISY IN THE CHURCH

Unfounded Pagan Criticism or Pitiful Reality?

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Of all charges levelled against the Church *hypocrisy* would have to rate amongst the highest and most common. In many circles Christians reject such criticisms out of hand with a 'that's just Satan having a go at the Church'. Others, wishing to sound intelligent and more theologically adept, will try to excuse themselves by appealing to the Apostle Paul's argument that the good I want to do I don't and the things I don't want to do, I do.¹

Then there are the theological 'Jargon Junkies' who will throw a bumper sticker like "Christians are not perfect, just forgiven" into the argument, hoping that this will deflect any flack and justify any failure on their part. If this fails, it is then time to stick one's head in the sand and pass the critics off as unintelligent sinners who, being completely unsanctified, cannot tell left from right anyway.² Lastly, and most serious of all, there are those who hide behind heresy and claim it to be Biblical truth. Antinomian thought would be a prime example of this.³

The problem with these answers is that they come as quick knee-jerk reactions. Instead of looking to see if there is any substance to the charge of hypocrisy, Christians lay down a smoke screen in a vain attempt to lose the enemy. It must be underscored, however, that the real task for the Christian is not to hide behind a vague dismissal of the charge of hypocrisy but rather to examine it carefully in the light of Biblical truth to see if there is evidence of error.

Therefore, these are the questions that need to be asked and answered:

- Are there hypocrites in the Church ?
- If so, why ?

Are There Hypocrites in the Church?

First of all we must identify whether or not the charge of hypocrisy is a

valid one. Are we as Christians hypocrites?

To answer this question is relatively easy. As Christians we wholeheartedly agree with Scripture and the confessions when they tell us that we are totally depraved; yet which one of us has not tried to excuse our misdeeds with one of the above mentioned scenarios.

Of course we are hypocrites! We pledge to uphold the laws of the land, yet when we are late for Church we wilfully decide to speed. (Not the best way to prepare for worship.) Murder is wrong! Yet when a daughter is raped and falls pregnant it is acceptable to abort the baby — but only in this situation. We condemn the world for sexual promiscuity but when a minister of standing is exposed as an adulterer no course of Biblical discipline is enacted. We will condemn homosexuality as an abomination yet tolerate divorce which the Lord equally hates.⁴ When a father is challenged about a wrong doing by a member of his household, he does not stop to consider it. Rather, it is dismissed out of hand, by a quickly muttered "a prophet is without honour

in his own town" in order to ease an aching conscience.

Unfortunately it must be concluded that there certainly is hypocrisy in the Church. This leads us to the second question that we need to face. That question is, Why? We need to seek a specific answer as to what causes Christians to have double standards.

Why Are There Hypocrites in the Church?

It is the answer to this question which every individual has to struggle with. At the start of this article several different ways of dealing with the charge of hypocrisy were put forward. The reality of the matter is that most - the exception being Antinomianism - have some degree of truth to them.

Satan certainly will try and attack the Church. His one chief weapon is to ruin the credibility of the Church. After all, who is likely to take advice from or join an organisation that is renowned for having double standards. Then there is an element of truth to our "Jargon Junkies" argument that "Christians are not perfect, just forgiven". Scripture shows us that there is a real

1. Rom 7:19.

2. This approach is like the little boy who, being naked, concluded that if he shut his eyes, no one could see him.

3. Antinomianism so stresses Christian freedom from the condemnation of the law that it underemphasizes the need for the believer to confess sins daily and to pursue sanctification earnestly. New Dictionary of Theology (I.V.P.) 379.

4. See Malachi 2:16

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Editor: Ian Hodge

The second reason that desperately needs to be addressed is that of understanding the purpose of salvation. There is a terrible delinquency in the church when it comes to understanding what our purpose in life is.

Knowledge Versus Practice

The real concern in the war against hypocrisy is to develop a harmonious relationship between knowledge and action. This may seem ridiculously simple, because hypocrisy is always defined as a failure to act in accordance with a confessed standard. For the church, however, the problem is wider and more complex. For us it is a matter of practicing what we have been given to preach. The church is encumbered with the responsibility of calling the world to account. Hence, the world's spotlight is aimed directly at us. One false move and it is noticed. Thus there is a pressing need for faith and practice to meet.

In essence the problem of hypocrisy stems purely from a failure to accept God's Word as the basis for all of life. Unlike the ungodly, the Christian has a ready-made textbook in which he is given all the information that he shall ever need in order to make and implement the correct decision. Thus the Westminster confession is correct when it says that;

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture.⁵

Our problem is that we are unwilling to use this revealed document in the correct manner.

Central to the problem lies the battle for dominion. Scripture tells us that we are to honour the Lord with heart, mind and will. Thus, the question is, What governs our will? Is it the heart or the mind? This is where our problems originate.

At this point we have two options. If the heart dictates the will then life is governed by emotionalism. This emotionalism usually leads to an implicit hypocrisy. By this I mean that Scripture is set aside as a standard with the result that people transgress in ignorance. On the other hand, if the intellect dictates, which would account for the majority of cases, then dead orthodoxy results. People know the word of God in an intellectual manner and con-

God is a Consuming Fire

Rev. Dr. P. George Logan

Rev. George Logan is minister of the Presbyterian Church of Engadine-Heathcote-Helensburg, in the southern suburbs of Sydney. This is a sermon from Deut. 4:24 and Heb. 12:29, preached on Sunday, January 16, 1994 in response to the fires that ravaged Sydney and other parts of New South Wales.

In the past week, the state of NSW has experienced bush fires, the likes of which have not been seen before in the lives of many. The fire, fanned by the wind, consumed everything in its path. It was no respecter of property or persons, of rich or poor, of intellectual or otherwise.

The bush fires of the past week have brought death and destruction, the breaking of families and homes. It has brought with it heartbreak and sorrow, anxiety and fear. The magnitude of what happened is difficult to describe.

One of the things it has achieved is what politicians would love to do, but could never achieve, and that is to bring the people of this country together. It has, on the other hand, brought politicians together, both Labour and Liberal. Labour states have offered help to this Liberal state of NSW; the fires have brought together police and community, emergency services and the ambulance, fire fighters and medical people.

But more still, the fires have brought out the good in people, those who have been willing to help others who were injured or lost property in the blaze. It has brought to the fore the concern which many have for their fellowman, the love, generosity, the giving of time, money, effort, energy, resources — *all for one common object* — and that was to help those in desperate need, the homeless, afflicted, those mourning the loss of loved ones and friends.

The ravaging fires of this past week, have brought the people of this nation together and united them in a way not many could have imagined. But, must it take a disaster of this magnitude and kind to bring a nation together — to pray for God to intervene? The Premier of this state has asked and called for a day of prayer — for rain. As Christians, we believe that God has everything in control, even the elements of nature, like the wind, the sun and the rain.

tension between the "now" and the "not yet". In other words, we are in the present being sanctified but still awaiting our glorification in which we shall be fully conformed to the image of God's son. We can also claim that the world is unspiritual and therefore ignorant of the struggles that face every Christian. This too is true for we know that darkness cannot understand light.⁵ Last of all, we can all sympathise with Paul's dilemma as it is described in Romans 7:19, where he outlines the struggle between what he desires to do as against that which he does.

It needs to be understood, however, that there is only limited mileage in each one of these answers and that they by no means fully answer the question of, Why the Church is full of hypocrites? To continually use these answers is "to flog a dead horse". The real answer to this question must be sought elsewhere.

In the search for an answer, two reasons can be identified as to why there is hypocrisy in the Church.

The first reason that needs to be addressed is that of intellectualism. This is evident in many Christian circles and is manifested by a genuine failure to put into practice what the Bible declares as true. This is because an intellectual understanding of Scripture is believed — mistakenly — to be equivalent to personal holiness. This syndrome exemplifies the old saying about faith being one foot higher than it should be. All in the head and not in the heart.

5. See 2 Corinthians 6:14-16a

6. Chapter 1, Article 6.

sider that this is all there is to being a serious Christian.

It is here that we can see how the rationalism of society has infiltrated the Church.

In our rationalistic society, we have no standard, only theoretical knowledge. This is why situational ethics is acceptable; Why politicians can lie and break promises and why a robber gets a longer jail term than a murderer. They have no *heart* conviction of truth, they only have a cerebral knowledge of what they deem to be right. Governed not by the Divine Law Giver but by frail human reason.

Unfortunately this attitude has crept into the Church and remains unchecked to our detriment. God's word is no longer the foundational truth on which all decisions are unquestioningly based. Rather, Scripture - where it is still used - is interpreted by human reason, emotion, circumstance or one's particular point of view. As this trend has developed it has seen an increase in careless and sloppy Christian living. No longer are Christians those odd, and somewhat peculiar people, who are completely trustworthy, diligent, responsible, neat, punctual and reliable. No! Now we are just odd and peculiar!

Christians were once looked to in society for leadership and guidance. But no longer. Once employers regarded Christians as assets because they were dependable. They could give a job to a Christian and know that the Protestant work ethic, his responsibility to his boss and devotion to God would mean that the job would be done in a correct manner and to a precise standard. Now Christianity can boast of no such thing.

As the Bible has been interpreted more by situation, circumstance, culture and opinion, the standards within Christian living have plummeted. We are hypocrites because we know the truth, claim to uphold the truth but act as if the truth does not exist.

The cause of Christian hypocrisy is a failure to shift our knowledge from our head to our heart. This was confirmed recently when, at the Church I attend, a small number of people completed a survey aimed at gauging the life of a Church. The survey was comprised of twenty questions, ten of which were framed positively and ten negatively. The results of this survey showed overwhelmingly that *knowledge did not equate with practice*. For example, one question asked if the word of God was what people based their decisions on. To this the answer

was 'yes'. However, when the question was reworded in the negative the result overwhelmingly showed that Scripture was not what people based their decisions on. Rather, reason or common sense were used. This result showed the disturbing reality that people who had been raised and educated in the Church only knew intellectually what they were supposed to believe. The tragedy was that they had no understanding of how that knowledge was to shape, affect and impact upon their lives. What these people had was an intellectual, or theoretical, understanding and that was all.

It is at this point that we encounter the ideal farming conditions in which to breed hypocrisy. This is where the predicament begins. Many Christians realise that they are meant to be different, but do not know where they should begin. They are compromised because they only have an intellectual grasp of doctrine and *not* a true desire to implement it.

The real tragedy is that the small group mentioned above is by no means alone. Sadly, the reality is that today there are many Christians who are under the impression that an intellectual understanding of doctrine is all that is required to be a good Christian. They have no concept of what it means to live out a doctrinal truth.

Therefore, we must see to it that the real test of Christianity lies in an examination of good works. We are all familiar with the old saying that "the proof of the pudding is in the eating". So we can say that the proof of the Christian is in the doing. This is not to say that we are saved by good works, for there is no road to God other than Grace. What is meant by this is that our attitude toward Christian life can be gauged by our approach to personal holiness\obedience. A Christian who says that he stands for something, yet does not practice it has no real conviction about sin, holiness and, in particular, the purity of God. This is because it is far easier to betray a theoretical piece of knowledge stored in one's head, than it is a conviction of the heart. Therefore in order to rectify this situation both the mind and the heart need to be saturated with Scripture so that both work in harmony.

For those who may be critical of this view of judging by deed, it is worth examining Scriptures point of view on this matter. In Psalm 15 the characteristics of the "man who may dwell" in the sanctuary of the Lord are outlined. Note that he is a doer. He is a man who "walks with integrity",

Once Jesus was in a boat asleep and a storm terrified his followers. Yet He spoke just a word, and the elements obeyed His voice.

Should we not rather therefore — as a nation — seek God's face in repentance and sorrow for sin? Even as God through the prophet said: "If MY people who are called by MY name shall humble themselves and pray, MY PEOPLE — you and I — *then shall I hear from heaven and will heal their land.*"

I would have thought that the prayer meeting before the service this morning would have been packed full of people seeking God, asking Him to have mercy upon us and our land. In all this, do we not hear the voice of God speaking to us? Are we so spiritually deaf that we just cannot hear His voice speaking to us through the roar of the fires, through the death of *five* people so far?

Can we not hear Him saying: "I AM GOD and there is none other. I the Lord your God am a consuming fire" — words found in the book of Deut. 4:24. Yes God *is* a consuming fire. Let me give you some O.T. examples. The first one is found in 1 Chron.21. King David numbered his fighting men, a sin according to the Law. As a consequence the Angel of the Lord killed 70,000 men. David purchased the threshing floor from Ornan to build an altar on which to offer burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. David repented, calling upon the Lord, and God answered him with *fire from heaven* on the altar of burnt offering.

David was the leader of the people of Israel, and he had sinned. When the leaders of God's people go astray, God will deal severely as a result. What church leaders should do today is to seek God in prayer and repentance and like David not give to the Lord that which costs us nothing.

If we want the fire of the *Holy Spirit* within the Church, we as leaders must repent of our sins before God.

The second O.T. example of God answering by fire is in 2 Chron.7. After Solomon had built the temple and had it dedicated to the Lord, when he had finished *praying* fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and sacrifices, *and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.*

If church leaders today would see and experience the *glory* of the Lord, they must *pray* . . . like Solomon. God is saying to leaders today, "Consecrate yourselves to Me, serve Me with all your heart, soul, mind and body. Observe and obey My precepts, laws and statutes."

And the third time God answers by fire, we read of this in 2 Kings 1. Here the *nation* of Israel had departed from

"speaks truth", "does not slander" or "do evil". He is a man who "honours those who fear the Lord" and despises the reprobate. At a glance it can be seen that he is being judged by his conduct. A conduct which is consistent with the holy statutes of God.⁷ (See also Psalm 24:3-5, Psalm 119:9-11, 35)

Jeremiah, in echoing the word of the Lord, says: "I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the result of his deeds" (Jeremiah 17:10, NASB).

The Bible itself uses the actions of a man as the "yard stick" for gauging the status of the heart. This finds no clearer expression than in Matthew 6:21 where we read; "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (NIV).

Furthermore we see that Jesus' biggest criticism of His arch enemies, the Pharisees, was that of hypocrisy. In Matthew 23:13-29 these people are condemned for their hypocrisy eight times. Yet, in verses 2 and 3 Jesus commends the Scribes and Pharisees for their ability to teach. They had a complete understanding of what the Law said. They knew it off by heart. Yet Jesus is quick in His condemnation because "they say things, and *do not do them*" (NASB).

Like the Pharisees and Scribes, we fail to practice what we preach. It is this contradiction in our lives between faith and practice that must be rectified in order to silence our critics.

This leads us to consider our second point.

What is the Purpose of Salvation?

Christians do not see the need for holy living because they have either forgotten, or not been taught, the elementary teaching about our purpose in life.

Why are we here? This is a question that philosophers and others have pondered for centuries. Even in modern psychology we find an emphasis on the quest for self discovery. It must be recognised, however that this question can only be answered in God. Because God exists, we exist. Our purpose in life is bound up in the eternal decrees of the Lord God Almighty and so it is to Him we must turn to find purpose and meaning in life.

Romans declares this truth by simply stating that ". . . from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever" (Romans 11:36, NASB.).

Question and answer 1 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism tells us that man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. It is at this point that we see why hypocrisy, and especially the failure to live holy lives, is so grounded in our failure to grasp the purpose of salvation.

Many Christians believe that, having been freed from the bondage of Satan and sin, they are now free to serve themselves, and do what is pleasing and/or honorable in their own eyes. This can only be labeled as heresy for it finds no basis in Scripture.

We must understand that we have been freed in order to serve our new Master. We have in *no way been given a personal freedom that means we may dictate what is right or wrong.*

Note carefully the words of Colossians 1:13: "For *He delivered* us from the domain of darkness, and TRANSFERRED US TO THE KINGDOM of His beloved Son." (NASB, emphasis is mine).

There is no autonomy mentioned in this passage. We have, by the grace of God, simply changed allegiance. Where once we were slaves to sin we are now slaves of righteousness. Instead of being dominated we are to have dominion. Hence we have Paul's plea that we "do not turn our freedom into an opportunity for the flesh (Galatians 5:13). Likewise Peter charges us to "Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bond-slaves of God" (1 Peter 2:16).

From this we can gauge that there is indeed a Christian freedom. However, it must be understood as pertaining to our being freed from our former state as slaves to sin. In other words we are freed from such things as death, being objects of wrath, slavish bondage to evil, animosity to God and the like. Our freedom is found in the fact that we are freed from the Curse⁸ and all its ramifications.

In light of this, the Westminster Confession is correct when it states: "They who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, do practice any sin, or cherish any lust, do thereby destroy the end of Christian Liberty."⁹

the Lord, serving other gods. Elijah challenged them by saying, "How long are you going to waver between two opinions, if the Lord is God — then follow Him, but if Baal is God — then follow him."

The contest between the 450 prophets of Baal and one prophet of God seemed mismatched. Elijah stood alone. The prophets of Baal slaughtered a bull and prepared it. They cut themselves from morning till evening but no answer from this dead god Baal. Eventually Elijah stepped forward, repaired the altar of the Lord, slaughtered bull, and soaked the wood with water.

It's 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon Elijah stepped forward, lifted up his heart in prayer . . . and down came fire and consumed the bull, the water-soaked wood, and the altar. This is how God answers. He answers by fire.

Children of the Lord, if we ask God for rain and we want Him to answer our prayers speedily, then we must repair the altar of the Lord. Among these must be the re-establishment of family worship. Prayer, too, is readily neglected.

The Character of God

The words, *for God is a consuming fire*, are also found in the New Testament in Heb.12:29. The God of the Old Testament is also the God of the New Testament. There are some scholars who pride themselves in their worldly wisdom and they tell us that we today have made great advances upon the O.T. revelation. But that is untrue, it is a lie, it is not so.

God wears the same character as in the days of Moses, David and the prophets. . . . He never changes; He is always the same. "I am the lord your God, I change not" (Malachi 3:6). *Our God* means God in covenant with us; it means our Father God, our God to whom we are reconciled. He is a consuming fire.

A large proportion of Christianity does not believe in this God. They profess to reverence a merciful God, and the moment you preach His justice they are indignant. The God who is a consuming fire is not accepted by many in the 20th century. But my faith is in the God of Abraham who will by no means spare the guilty. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the one and only God, and HE is my God.

He that killed Pharaoh at the Red Sea, that smote kings and slew mighty rulers — is my God and I believe in Him as the God and Father of our Lord

7. Note specifically the emphasis in vs 2 on the truth coming from the heart. This truth then sets the tone for the rest of the passage.

8. See Genesis 2: 16-17, 3:14-19

9. Chapter 20 Section 3

In contrast to this, the same article describes Christian liberty as; "being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, (that) we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life."¹⁰

This point is underscored by Paul's exhortation: "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31, NASB).

Thus, Scripture emphasises the fact that we are not free to make our own rules regarding righteousness. To glorify God means nothing less than complete obedience to His revealed statutes.¹¹ This means that when the Lord says "do not murder", it means do not murder. No exception. The shedding of man's blood is not acceptable. Man is not free to make exceptions or invent categories such as first or second degree murder.¹²

Second Corinthians 5:20-21 makes the very pertinent point that *we are ambassadors for Christ*. As such we are not free to make up the message we carry. Rather, we are obligated to faithfully issue - by word and deed - the message Christ has entrusted to us.

Moreover, Ephesians 2:10 tells us that "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (NASB).¹³

This last passage should convince the skeptics. It demonstrates clearly that our purpose is found in God and the things He has destined for us to do.

Scripture has no room for any ideas about loose and sloppy living dictated by human will. Scripture only recognises the transformation of the will through the renewing of the mind in order that we may understand God's good and perfect will (Romans 12:2).

Having highlighted these two areas that contribute to hypocrisy let us now look at a Scriptural remedy.

The Remedy

The first step in overcoming hypocrisy is to be open to God's leading. Pray that God, through Word and Spirit, will convict men of their failings. Along with this there needs to be the realisation that it is not good enough just to know something theoretically. The Lord wants us to *act* upon the knowledge that He has revealed unto

us.¹⁴ It is this very point that is fundamental to winning the fight against hypocrisy. There must be a willingness to pray for the Lord to convict us over areas where faith and practice do not meet.

The second step in reaching any remedy is heart felt repentance before the Lord. This is to be followed by a sincere request for the necessary power and ability to put into practice all that God, through His Word and Spirit, has shown to be correct.

You see, Scripture holds no commendation, no glory, no praise, no eternity, nothing, for hearing the Word of God and filing it away in our cerebral store of useless information. Neither does it hold reward for those who listen and store it in a useful file. No! Scripture has but one commendation and it is this: "everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock" (Matthew 7:24 NASB, emphasis is mine).

This passage goes on to describe as foolish those who have heard the Word and *not acted* upon it. This demonstrates that hearing alone is of little benefit. An obligation exists for both unbelievers and regular worshipers to act in accordance with what has been heard. Thus, the failure to act shall bring condemnation. James underscores this fact by saying: "the one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

Having understood these two key elements we now must turn and consider a Scriptural paradigm (model).

In 2 Peter 1:5-11 we have a list of qualities that are essential for a Christian life. The list begins in verse five with faith, the one element from which all things in the Christian's life flow. The list then continues; goodness, knowledge, self control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love.

The area that is of most concern for us are those attributes listed in verses 5 and 6. It is important in these verses to note the change between what may be termed as inward qualities and external signs. Hence we have a starting point for defeating hypocrisy.

Because we are now new creatures — through faith — we seek a moral

Jesus Christ. I know no God but Abraham's God, the great I AM.

Under the New Testament, God is not an atom less severe than under the O.T. And under the covenant of Grace — the Lord is not a particle less righteous, than under the law. We are so saved by mercy, that *no sin* goes unpunished. The law is as much honored under the gospel as under the law.

God's View of Sin

The substitution of Jesus displays the wrath of God against sin — even as the flames of hell would do. While the Lord is merciful — infinitely so, and His name is love, yet still, our God is a consuming fire, and sin shall not live in His sight. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. The Scriptures speak of *another kind of consuming fire*.

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. (1 Cor. 3:10-13 NKJV).

This is the kind of fire which will test our work and our labour. Our foundation must be Jesus Christ and the prophets & apostles. We must take heed *how* we build, not just to get through the work. We must take some conscious pride in our work for God. Everything we do should be the best we can do.

Some people build with wood, hay or straw. You say that you are doing your very best for the kingdom of God, God says: let's test it. Let's see what sort of work you have done. It will be an awful moment when the fire leaps upon it. The fire does not spare. It penetrates, scorches, burns, tests. What miserable work some people do. Any self glorying work will be burnt up — despicable to God. A life of dreams and speculations, these are insubstantial, found wanting in purpose and accomplishment. Wasted lives they are and will not stand the test of fire.

It is an impartial test, fire tries *every man's* work. It is no respecter of persons . . . just like the bush fires. Fire cannot burn gold. There is a quality that only fire can test. Take heed,

10. *Ibid.*

11. See Genesis 18:19. The way of the Lord = justice and righteousness.

12. See Genesis 9:5,6; Exodus 21:12-14; Leviticus 24:17; Numbers 35:10-34; Joshua 20:2-6.

13. The N.I.V. renders it "Which God prepared in advance for us to do."

14. 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

goodness which only God can supply. The place to find this moral goodness is in God's revealed Word. As we saturate ourselves with this Word we increase in our understanding in two key areas. Firstly, God's purity and secondly, the knowledge of what we are to be. At this point it becomes necessary for our knowledge to be translated into external signs. Thus we must become self controlled. We can no longer let the flesh master us — nor can we willingly cherish fleshly desires — but rather we must wage war in order to bring all things under dominion to Christ. As part of this war we will need to persevere. For it is only through persevering in self control that we can ever reach godliness. Paul says that it is only the one who runs and completes the course, who will receive the crown (1 Corinthians 9:24,25; 2 Timothy 4:7,8). At this point it is clear that knowledge has supplied the basis for lives being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

Whilst it is true that the intent of the passage is that all these qualities be developed together, it can also be seen that there is an order and a sequence to them. It must be seen that as each of these virtues is practiced it becomes the soil into which the following seed is planted and nurtured. If the sequence is interrupted at any point a stunted plant will be the only result.

This, however, is not all Peter has to tell us. Verse 8 clearly shows us that "practicing what we preach" is an essential item in Christianity. The practice of these qualities renders men neither useless, nor unfruitful. This truth is highlighted all the more in verse 9 where Peter compares those who lack in practical Christianity with the unregenerate. He says pointedly that failure to act in accordance with the truth reflects a failure to remember our purification from sin. A point has been reached in the lives of such people where salvation is considered as worthless. There is no longer a clear distinction between regenerate and unregenerate living.

These words are very strong but they show exactly where the problem lies and just how serious this problem is. Note, though, that in spite of the serious nature of this charge there is also a glorious promise. In verses 10 and 11 Peter makes it clear that when we "practice these things . . . (we) will

never stumble". As we continue in these Godly actions we confirm that we are saved. By righteous living we have confirmation of our salvation. In these statements we have a shadow of Paul's call to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). Here we are shown clearly that holy living is a comfort to us as it testifies that we are new creatures.

In addition to this James has some equally weighty comments to make regarding knowledge and practice. In chapter 1, James goes to great lengths to force home the need for our faith and practice to be united. In verse 22 James charges his listeners to "prove yourselves doers of the word" rather than those deluded individuals who are hearers only. In contrast to this he urges people in verse 25 to look at "the perfect law" and "abide by it". Thus James instructs us that by "abiding" by the perfect law we shall avoid being a deluded and forgetful hearer and thereby become an effectual and blessed doer.

James concludes with a description of what pure and undefiled religion is. Let us first note, however, what it is not. It is not being able to recite large tracts of Scripture or quote at length from either the Heidelberg or Westminster catechisms. Nor is it being able to pontificate about the metaphysics of apologetics in the cosmic idea as expounded by Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven.¹⁵

According to James, pure and undefiled religion in the sight of God, is to do the basics of looking after the orphans and widows and keeping ourselves from being tainted by the world. What James has to say can best be summed up by the following quote: "Knowing what to do *must be* translated into doing what you know."¹⁶ This quote pin points the Christian's *obligation* to maintain a consistency between Biblical faith and practice.

As we strive to become more consistent we need to keep in mind why there is a need to dispense with hypocrisy. Jesus Christ, the Righteous One owns you. Remember vividly the words of question and answer 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism where it says: "I am not my own but belong body and soul in life and death to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ".

If we would seek to see these charges of hypocrisy cease then there

therefore, *how you build*. Let there be no delusion about the matter of judgement. The fire will be an external critic.

God judges the motives, the spirit. There are Peters who, all tears and all shame can say: "Lord You know all things, You know how I have lied, how I have gone astray, how I have spoken the language of hell, how I have played the fool. You know also that I love You, even though I am so weak."

The fire fighters have laid their *lives on the line*. Some, in their concern for the safety of others, have died. Jesus Christ laid His life on the line — for you and me. He gave His life that we might live. He died, that we might be reconciled to God, that we might have life, more abundantly.

What are we building? for every person is a builder. Are we building the house of God, the temple of God?; or the house of darkness? If we place our trust in material things, they can vanish overnight. One day you have them, the next — gone.

Our God is a consuming fire: May the awfulness, devastation, sorrow, and grief of the fires of this last week — may *these* make us think about GOD.

is only one way to achieve it. In the power of the Holy Spirit we must determine to honour our master Jesus Christ with the whole of our lives and not just our head and mouth. The following words must be our goal:

In all things *show yourself to be an example* of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is above reproach, in order that the opponent may be put to shame, *having nothing bad to say about us* (Titus 2:7,8, NASB, emphasis is mine).

No longer hide behind catchy bumper stickers or theological jargon. Let us call a spade, a spade and not, a horticultural implement. It is time that we as Christians faced the reality that there is much hypocrisy in the Church, and that most of it stems from a failure on our part to understand and practice the truths of Scripture as they have been clearly revealed.

In striving to be consistent always remember the glorious promise: that "he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:17b).

15. Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven sought to show that there is only one basic presupposition on which science, law, philosophy and the like, could be based. That base was the true God. Thus the "cosmic idea" was an attempt at bringing all realms and spheres under dominion for Christ.

16. Bruce Wilkinson, *Walk Thru the Old Testament* 1989, p23.