

Life Begins With God

1941

MERLIN L. NEFF

PACIFIC PRESS PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION
MOUNTAIN VIEW, CALIFORNIA

Life Begins With God

PREFACE

THE plan of this book grew out of my association with modern young men and women in the college classroom. In those impromptu open forums, which I cherish as some of the brightest moments of my teaching days, they discussed their outlook on life with a frankness and honesty which I have always admired. The youth of America are candid and sincere. They are anxious to find the basis of true happiness, the foundation for a noble, sterling character.

On my desk is an editorial by a college youth from the newspaper of the University of Iowa. The headline reads: "Take Us Back to Solid Ground." The writer affirms that young people have not been shown how to live. Here are his words to the older generation:

"You haven't taught us to be able to take it. We aren't living within our means, and we followed your example. We are afraid of hard work; you never taught us to love it. We can't accept responsibility; you couldn't before us. We don't know the meaning of discipline; you didn't discipline us. We have nothing to which we can cling as the understood, almost tangible jewel of our American heritage. It is there, but you understand it even less than we do."

This man of the campus then adds: "We want constant training in the constant things of life, the physical, mental, and spiritual things which have been the foundations of humanity since the civilizations of ancient China."

Because it is my firm conviction that youth longs to find "solid ground"-the permanent values, the constant things of life I have written my answer to young people of the twentieth century as I, a youth of this century, have confronted the problems and found the solution in my own experience.

Unless otherwise stated all quotations from the Bible are taken from The Bible, An American Translation, edited by J. M. Powis Smith and Edgar J. Goodspeed. These quotations are used with the kind permission of The University of Chicago Press. I have chosen to use the texts from this translation because the clear, modern reading may help many young people to understand the Scriptures more perfectly.

THE AUTHOR. Mountain View, California. February 3, 1941.

Life Begins With God

CONTENTS

1. DOES LIFE LEAD TO A DEAD END
 2. THE QUEST ETERNAL
 3. PUTTING RELIGION IN THE ANTIQUE SHOP
 4. THE LABORATORY VERSUS THE CHURCH
 5. THE GUIDEBOOK FOR ADVENTURERS
 6. WHAT CAN A MAN BELIEVE?
 7. IS SIN A MYTH?
 8. THE PIONEER OF LIFE
 9. THE ROAD BACK
 10. THE GOLD STANDARD OF MORALS
 11. LOOK HOMEWARD, CHRISTIAN
 12. THE TEST OF ALLEGIANCE
 13. "A THING OF BEAUTY"
 14. THE SYMPHONY OF LIFE
 15. IT'S DANGEROUS TO THINK
 16. THE GOLDEN MEAN
 17. LIFE TRIUMPHS WITH GOD
- BIBLIOGRAPHY

Life Begins With God

1. DOES LIFE LEAD TO A DEAD END?

ACROSS from me sat Ralph Winthrop, his hands toying with an ivory letter opener on his mahogany desk. Ralph, the manager of a western wholesale radio company at the age of twenty-eight, had been recounting his rapid advancement with the firm. He had started as an assistant in the shipping room while he was attending high school; his summers during college vacation had given him promotion, and after graduation he had advanced to a successful manager ship.

“Life seems to have treated you pretty well,” I casually suggested.

I really haven’t anything to complain about as far as business is concerned. I have a home, and it’s happy enough; but I’m not satisfied.”

“I don’t quite understand, Ralph.”

“It’s hard to explain. I really don’t know what is the matter with me. After high-school days I attended a Christian college, and made good grades. I was a leader in student affairs. I played on the football team; but I was indifferent to religion. When anyone approached me on this subject I would shrug my shoulders and say, ‘Religion and business don’t mix well for success, and I’m going for business.’”

“Um! I see, Ralph. You were obsessed with the thought that money was everything. Well, you’re not the only young person with such ideas. Just the other day I read in the newspaper that 80 per cent of the freshmen of the state university with twelve thousand students had declared that their chief reason for desiring an advanced education was to be better trained to make money.”

I don’t doubt it. It’s the modern mania. But now that I have money, leisure time, and friends, I find I’m not happy. You see, my leisure time bores me, my friends fail me when I need them, and money can’t buy happiness. I hate to think of all the time ahead of me if I live to be an old man.”

Winthrop’s puzzled brow was turned toward the light of the window. He had evidently unlocked the secret of his heart.

“Have you tried to think it all through, Ralph?”

“Think! Man, I hate to think! To tell you the truth, I’m afraid of my thoughts. When I think, I begin to realize I haven’t anything! I’m a sham. I’m a selfish oyster living totally for my personal interests. What will I have to show for my life? I’ve awakened to the truth that I’m facing a blind alley. It seems blank ahead.”

Ralph is one of many twentieth-century young men and women with gifted talents, ambitions for an education, for business success, and for a home of their own who are wrestling with the fear that their present career leads down a street marked “Dead End.” He is not the only one who is longing for happiness, success, and security, yet finding himself in a mental fog.

What happens to men and women who scoff at a religious life? Such an authority as the famous psychiatrist, Dr. C. G. Jung, has recorded his observations of those who choose such a course, in his book, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*: “During the past thirty years people from all the civilized countries of the earth have consulted me. Among all my patients in the second half of life that is to say, over thirty-five—there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life and none of them has been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook.”[1]

Physical stamina, as well as the mental powers of humanity, is cracking under the strain of humanly-faced problems. Nervous, irritable, melancholy women and men bring a whirl of troubles upon themselves because they refuse to balance their bread-and-butter existence with religion.

The early settlers of America never attempted to face their problems in a New World without depending upon the guidance of Providence. The Pilgrim leaders settled where pestilence and savage red men depleted their sturdy band; yet they praised God through all their trials. These United States could not have become the nation it is if the founders had not been men possessed with a religious drive.

The spirit of Mary Rowlandson epitomizes the hardships of the pioneer mother. In 1676 she was forced to flee with her young daughter, both captives of Indians, after she had seen her home burned and her relatives murdered. On the twelve-day march her daughter died. But in spite of her many sufferings she wrote that God was “a very present help in trouble,” and she adds: “God was with me in a wonderful manner, carrying me along, and bearing up my spirit.”[2] What would be the diary of a modern young man or woman under similar circumstances if he or she faced the hardship and struggle without spiritual power?

Such faith was demanded when puny man fought almost single handed against the savage wilderness. Today the frontier has gone, and with it have passed many of the hardships which challenged the pioneers. Edgar Lee Masters, describing a frontier mother who has lived to be ninety-six years of age,

Life Begins With God

puts these words in her mouth for the younger generation: “What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness, Anger, discontent, and drooping hopes? Degenerate sons and daughters, Life is too strong for you It takes life to love Life.” [3]

To love life one must have a vision, a spiritual quest, which is not swayed by the petty problems or crushed under the major crises. He must see beyond the fog of doubt where the eternal stars of faith still shine.

Before we grow proud over the achievements of science and invention, we must consider the words of Dr. Alexis Carrel, Nobel laureate in medicine and famed researcher. His verdict is: “We are unhappy. We degenerate morally and mentally. The groups and the nations in which industrial civilization has attained its highest development are precisely those which are becoming weaker, and whose return to barbarism is the most rapid. But they do not realize it. They are without protection against the hostile surroundings that science has built about them. In truth, our civilization, like those preceding it, has created certain conditions of existence which, for reasons still obscure, render life itself impossible.”[4]

Youth, then, faces physical degeneracy and mental instability. It is a part of the heritage given us by a disintegrating world. Are we foolish enough to attempt the impossible, to go ahead without religious faith? Or shall we follow the example of millions of men and women before us who found the solution to their problems through a belief in God?

Many a youth of one hundred years ago caught his first vision of God in the home. It was here that father and mother gathered the family to read the Bible and to kneel in prayer asking a heavenly Father’s guidance and support in facing life’s perplexities. Peace, love, beauty, and trust were created in the heart.

In such a Christian home John Greenleaf Whittier was reared, and his character developed strength and fortitude. Through spiritual communion he learned truth and justice. When an angry mob came to burn the newspaper office where he was editor, he could stand unflinchingly for what he believed was right. When death robbed him of his dearest loved ones, he could write in faith:

“I know not what the future hath
Of marvel or surprise,
Assured alone that life and death
His mercy underlies.

I know not where His islands lift
Their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care.” [5]

With the advent of the machine age and the transition of American life from the rural home to city existence, life has grown bleak and cynical. Knowledge has been education’s great aim; but there has been little thought as to how the character developed. Progress has been measured by the speed of wings and wheels, by the invention of radio, X ray, television, and a thousand other material miracles. We have forgotten that with the same machines, the hates, fears, and evil brutish forces have been let loose to annihilate millions of old men, helpless women and children, as well as the flower of youth. We have forgotten that a bleak outlook on life, a disbelief in a God, and a hatred for fellow men have developed in the heart as rapidly as inventions sprang out of civilization.

When youth faces the future with feeble prospects of securing a permanent job and independence; when he sees every profession crowded, he may think he is facing a blank wall. In such a time he will probably take one of the following viewpoints:

He may curse his fate and declare his work is not worth the effort. “I’ll eat, drink, and be merry, for what does the morrow hold for me anyway?” He may reason that it is not fair to be born poor. He may growl cynically, turn radical, and perhaps end in a reckless career. This is one way to face life without God.

He may attempt to achieve material success at any price, as Ralph Winthrop did. The only god he worships is self, the only bible he reads is the stock market report. He attempts to achieve power with money; he finds it brings him prestige and self-glory. “What of the future?” lie scornfully asks. “I’m lord and master here and now. That’s enough!

Let questioning youth con his problems: “Why am I here? Is there a supreme power to whom I owe allegiance? Where shall I go when it’s all over?” If he is afraid to look at realities, he may attempt to stifle his thoughts in the study of science, the arts, or letters. I have seen scholars who were afraid to read

Life Begins With God

the news of the day. As one young professor picked up my newspaper and scanned the headlines, he said, I feel happier every day that I can study the life and thought of the sixteenth century. I'm scared of what I see in my own times. I wonder where we are going." Such men admit there are world issues which cannot be faced with human wisdom.

Life without the recognition of God may be the choice of thousands of young men and women today; but they must be made to realize that when the candle has burned down, it will have only lighted "the way to dusty death." And like the fame seeking Macbeth, cornered in his blind alley because he has destroyed his conscience and broken the moral law, such a modern generation will say:

"Out, out brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player, That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, And then is heard no more: it is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing." [6]

An age that can hurl a lightning bolt around the globe and make it speak to all men, a generation that has taken wings and flown to the uttermost parts of the earth, has not found a substitute for God. It is true that some men say they live by bread alone, but they deceive themselves. A professor of religion writes: "But plumb down in the crypt and abyss of every man's soul is a hunger, a craving for other food than this earthy stuff. A man wouldn't care what he had to give up if he knew he was working for something inestimably precious. . . . Light, light that's what he wants; and the longer it's withheld, the lower he'll sink." [7]

The solution to life's problems of the twentieth century can be found in this statement: "The fact of the religious vision . . . is our one ground for optimism. Apart from it, human life is a flash of occasional enjoyment lighting up a mass of pain and misery, a bagatelle of transient experience." [8] Disillusioned by a world which knows economic collapse, disappointed by lack of social reforms, embittered by hypocrisy, youth without God stands upon "a darkling plain Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, Where ignorant armies dash by night." [9]

Regain faith and see the "dead end" disappear from your pathway. Regain love for your fellow men and see the joy in giving your life in service for others. Regain love for God and watch the doubts and speculations vanish.

2. THE QUEST ETERNAL

DO YOU ever challenge the problems relating to your existence? Have you asked, 'What am I building with the physical strength, the mental powers, and the spiritual longing which has been given me?' A writer asks the question this way: 'What is thy life?' Confronted with the issue, we cannot brush it aside lightly. Here is a paramount question which must be answered. How have men built in other generations? Where did they get the vision to create a rich life of service?

The Greeks took hope from their pagan gods. Pindar, creator of odes, declared: "God accomplished every end whereon He thinks, God who overtakes the eagle on the wing, and passes the dolphin in the sea, who bends the high-minded in his pride, and to others He gives deathless glory." Plato, philosopher of Greece, in his Laws makes this statement upon man's relation to a supreme being: "He who would be dear to God must, as far as possible, be like Him and such as He is."

Here were deep thinkers who were wrestling with divine thoughts without a knowledge of the true God. They acknowledged that there was a purpose in life when it was linked with a religious experience. In the eyes of the Greeks a life must be patterned with divine assistance.

Jesus Christ brought a truer picture of God to man than the world had ever known. The Word was made flesh; love was incarnate. No wonder the Roman Empire was conquered by the teachings of the Galilean. New ideals sprang full-bodied from the minds of men who followed the way of the cross.

The literature of England is filled with man's highest thoughts as they center around faith in the Almighty. From the days when the barbarians from northern Europe settled in Britain and heard the Christian missionaries, English literature has been the reflection of one book, the Bible. Early poetry recounts Bible tales, while through the writings of John Wycliffe, Geoffrey Chaucer, Edmund Spenser, and a hundred other literary men, the golden cord of faith in God is ever present.

William Cowper can express his faith through sorrow and despair in words of beauty.

"O, for a closer walk with God!
A calm and heavenly frame,

Life Begins With God

A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb.” [1]

As we read the poetry of the Christian lyricist, Robert Browning, we find no despair and no pessimism. His faith is certain. For one of the richest statements of his belief read “Rabbi Ben Ezra,” which begins thus:

“Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who said, A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half: trust God: see all, nor be afraid!” [2]

Poets are individuals whose keen sensibilities cause them to search deeply for the foundations of life; they attempt to find the eternal strength of all things. Therefore, our great poets have found a satisfying joy in living with the thought of God uppermost in their hearts. They were not defeated by blind alleys of doubt, disillusionment, or fear.

Wisely or foolishly, we are each creating a house of life in which we must live. If we cheat in the building of character the flaws will show in eternity. Some men build the temple of life as the carpenter erected a house for a rich man. Every financial resource was given the builder so he would put the choicest materials in the house; ‘but he decided to be crafty and use inferior lumber, cement, and plaster in the construction where he thought it could not be detected. Now when the house was completed, the wealthy owner said, “My friend, you have built a house which I am giving to you as a reward for your services.”

“Oh,” said the carpenter, when the donor had departed, “if I had only used the finest materials. I never dreamed I was building a house that would be mine!”

If a poor foundation of education has gone into your character, do not laugh at how you “got by” your teachers. Remember you have cheated yourself. If you are tempted to compromise with moral principles, stop and think; you are weakening your life now and for the future.

Every dream of our hearts, every action and word, is a part of the temple we build. Eternity will test the character we have created. When challenged by trial and temptation the enduring character will grow stronger. Edwin Markham shows the merit of struggle.

“Defeat may serve as well as victory To shake the soul and let the glory out. When the great oak is straining in the wind, The boughs drink in new beauty, and the trunk Sends down a deeper root on the windward side. Only the soul that knows the mighty grief Can know the mighty rapture. Sorrows come To stretch our spaces in the heart of joy.”[3]

Do not accept Christianity because you hope God will coddle you. Our Lord prays for us and assists us in hours of trial, but He will not remove us from life’s stress and strain. Goethe said, “Difficulties prove men.”

To create a temple of life which shall endure has been the quest eternal. “How can I find happiness in this world? Is there life beyond death?” asks man in every generation. The answer is not easy to find in the twentieth century, for our religious and moral strength lags behind our material advancement.

Vice is made enticing; compromise with sin is made easy. Prosperity and luxuries are hindrances to strong character growth. A Roman girl promised to betray her city if every enemy soldier would give her the bracelet on his arm. She was crushed by the weight of gifts. So may we be crushed by the treasures of civilization which we cannot handle in humility.

Character building, the task of a lifetime, demands the richest materials the soul can find. When art, earthly beauty, riches, and science have decayed, there will remain the perfection of a beautiful human character. Into the foundation of every man must go the element of faith. Without confidence in friends and companions no man is happy. Faith is a prerequisite of a social being; to have faith is to adventure forth with your spirit. It is betting one’s life with actions. But faith in man is not enough; faith in God multiplies the importance of life to the believer. He has a vision of what the future holds forth, and he knows no more of doubting. Religious faith, like human trust, must be demonstrated with deeds.

Add to faith the element of temperance. Aristotle of the ancient world called temperance the “Golden Mean.” How difficult it is for mortals to remain in the middle of the way! Like a pendulum, the actions of man sway from one extreme to another. Not so the successful leader; he must maintain a constant

Life Begins With God

fixed goal. Neither can the Christian wobble back and forth in his religious career. "This one thing I do" will echo through his heart.

Courage is essential in the house of life. Fear seizes many individuals today, and they go down with a shriek of cowardice. A man accosted Cholera who was returning from devastating a city.

"How many died?" he asked.

"Eighty thousand," Cholera replied, "but I touched only twenty thousand."

"And what happened to the rest?"

"Oh, they died of fear."

Human nature has not altered much from the day the unfaithful servant excused himself by explaining, I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth." Spiritual courage must be linked with physical and moral fortitude. We need the courage to remain true to our convictions.

For the keystone of the house of life take love, the greatest element for the soul of man. The golden rule is never obsolete. Alfred Tennyson wrote a poem, "The Palace of Art," in which he described the soul of man creating a beautiful palace. Every art was used to enrich and adorn the perfect structure; but when it was complete there was no happiness. Something was missing. There was no love for others in the heart. Never was a greater essay written than Paul's summary of love in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. His conclusion epitomizes the entire subject for all men: "So faith, hope, and love endure. These are the great three, and the greatest of them is love."

Faith, temperance, courage, and love are enduring elements for the building of character. If you seek the life which shall remain beautiful in perfection when materialism of the age has faded, you will make strong the beams with faith, you will build with temperance, and you can enforce the walls with courage. Over the temple you can place love, to shelter life from the sordid, the brutal, the selfish, and the evil.

But with these virtues in the soul there will be only an empty structure when it is completed, unless you have invited Jesus Christ to enter. Without the Master you and I live in haunted houses. We must renounce the petty plans of self for the love of God. James Hinton said: "Never fear to let go, it is the only means of getting better things- self-sacrifice. Let go; let go; we are sure to get back again. And if the question will intrude, What shall I have if I give up this?" relegate that question to faith, and answer, 'I shall have God. In my giving, in my love, God, who is love, gives Himself to me.'" This is the end of man's eternal quest.

3. PUTTING RELIGION IN THE ANTIQUE SHOP

"WHY go to church? What's the value of religion in modern life? If I want knowledge, I seek the scholar or scientist; when I desire money, I enter the world of business; if my health fails me, I see a physician; when my worries perplex me, I go to a psychiatrist." I have met youth who ask these questions and make these answers. They are willing to place religion in the antique shop along with the heirlooms of our ancestors.

Although our nation has preachers and churches, we are not a people strong in spiritual life and thought. We worship gods of gold, of knowledge, of ambition, of pleasure, and of houses and lands more than we worship the God of heaven. The religion which American youth must find is the example of Jesus Christ. Tolstoy said, "Religion is a life." The Christian religion is Jesus Christ in action in twentieth-century lives! This is our challenge!

It is not difficult to discover some of the obstructions blocking religion. First, it must be admitted that many churches have failed to vitalize truth. Religion has sometimes been a cloak which is put on one day a week, but the other six days it is removed while one works or plays. A creed which is not practicable every day is dead formalism. As youth have observed such hypocrisy they have sometimes concluded that all religion is a sham. Judge not Christianity by professed church members. The test of living Christianity is the life. Says Dr. C. G. Jung: "Religion is not a question of belief, but of experience. No matter what the world thinks about religious experience, the one who has it possesses a great treasure which has provided him with a source of life, meaning, and beauty, and which has given a new splendor to the world and to mankind. He has peace." [1] This is the religion Jesus Christ holds out to humanity.

No man has a right to deride Christianity until he has put it to the test in his own experience. Religion is like mountain climbing; it opens new and wider horizons, for man sees not only himself and the world, but he considers himself, the world, and God. It is the task of Christianity "to lead man into the

Life Begins With God

presence of the Most High and thus to show him the meaning of the whole and the way to life.”

Youth educated in the American high schools and colleges is faced with a second barrier to religious development. In the majority of classrooms the decadence of Christianity has been continual and tragic. Bernard Iddings Bell says: “One of the most serious charges brought against the typical American university of the moment is that its graduates are, for the most part, either antagonistic to religion or else, more commonly, indifferent to it. There seems to be no doubt that the facts bear out the allegation.” [2] There are too many scholarly professors who pride themselves on the ability to destroy the faith of young students; and what is more tragic, these men are helpless to offer any outlook on life but the husk of their egotistical speculations. Sooner or later youth pays dearly for this crass indifference toward spiritual values.

The educational setup is often unfair to religion. Both the affirmative and the negative viewpoints are seldom stated; it is generally a system of negative teaching spiced with scorn and ridicule. The search after God should continue to be the greatest study in education. Harvard College was established for the purpose of training the intellectual, moral, and spiritual powers of the students. The board of trustees said, “Let every student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well. The main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life” John 17:3; and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning.” Such an aim is exceedingly old-fashioned to many present-day educators; and the product of their labors, when sent into a troubled world, shows plainly what their new philosophy has done.

If it has been your lot to receive an education without a religious foundation, do not, as a young man or woman, be satisfied until you have known religion for yourself. Test Christianity in the light of your modern experiences and find out how faith in God unfolds purpose and value to your life.

A third reason for the disappearance of religion in America is the diminishing value of the individual. A young man fitting himself into society finds a cold machine which deadens his creative powers and demands only special talents and capabilities. He finds himself losing his individuality in the factory, in the city turmoil, and in the nation. He is forced on and on in the materialism of the age. Therefore, as Berdyaev declares, “Man faces the threat that nothing shall ‘be left of himself, of his personal and intimate life or his creative thought.” [3] When young men and women plunge into this complex regime they see gigantic forces ready to crush their dreams, hopes, and longings. Both economic and political power may drive out the desire for spiritual growth. Following millions of their fellow men, youth rush toward materialistic goals; they neglect the beautiful, the true, and the good. They become puppets in a world beyond their understanding and endurance, and accept their fate with a cynical twist of the mind.

It was the spirit of the Renaissance that restored the value of the individual in culture and the arts, and it was the zeal of the Reformation that re-created the ideal of individual religion. Jesus Christ called Peter, John, Matthew, and the other disciples to follow Him as individuals. His gospel never destroyed the dreams, the hopes, or the mind of a single human being. The Master talked with the rich young ruler, the woman at the Samaritan well, the leader Nicodemus, and the thief on the cross. He saw the intrinsic value of one man.

When a hundred thousand followers gather at a dictator’s command, when in the cities millions of people trample one upon another, when the industrial system emphasizes mass working conditions and mass production, the individual sinks lower in the worth of the world. Man loses faith in himself; he doubts that a personal God can love and care for him. He knows so few individual experiences; he becomes fearful of attempting a personal religious life so vital in his tumultuous environment. Or he may react oppositely to his mass living and become intoxicated in the action of the crowd. Filled with this false power he may scorn to acknowledge his allegiance to God.

Therefore, the very factors which have undermined religion are the most serious reasons why a spiritual life is necessary for youth. Religion has not died; it cannot die as long as part of the image of God remains in man. Christianity is a refuge for men and women who come to realize that their playthings will never save them.

A man told of his experience during a hurricane which blew in from the Gulf of Mexico. The wind increased in fury until twelve-story buildings were shaken by the one-hundred-forty-mile gale. I never prayed in my life until that night,” said he, describing his hours of terror. I prayed enough to last me all the rest of my life,” he added with a laugh. He was not a religious man, and he made no profession of Christianity; yet he had called on a Higher Power in his extremity.

But such emergency measures will never bring confidence or spiritual growth to any man or woman. We must accept the challenge, and point the way to a constant religious life. In an age characterized by a lack of honesty and a loss of integrity in political, business, and professional leadership,

Life Begins With God

it rests upon the younger generation to pioneer the way back to a code of honest business ethics, the standard of the golden rule, and the practice of Christian virtues. When individual thought is crushed by dictatorial nations, mass living, science, and industry, young men and women must prove that it is possible to live above the fogs of doubt, despair, and fear. "The greatest want of the world is the want of men, men who will not be bought or sold; men who in their inmost souls are true and honest. Men who do not fear to call sin by its right name; men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole; men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall." [4]

Like a majestic mountain thousands of feet above the surrounding lowlands, throwing its snowy summit above the fog and smoke, so the teachings of Jesus Christ remain the pinnacle of morality and character. "Behold the Man!" is the challenge to youth. Study His life and His love, then YOU will find the answer to your problem.

One evening a father cut up a map of North America and told his son to piece it together. In this way the father Planned to keep his boy busy while he read the newspaper. In a remarkably short time the lad had the map fitted together perfectly.

"How did you happen to do it so quickly?" asked the father in surprise.

"It was easy, dad," answered Freddie. "There was the picture of a man on the other side! I followed his picture."

How true this may be in your life and mine! The disconnected pieces seem to be an endless blunder as we attempt to match them. There seems to be little design or purpose, and we grow weary and puzzled. But life has design, direction, and beauty if we look at "the Man" behind our life. His example, His teachings, His character, may form the pattern for our lives morally, spiritually yes, entirely!

4. THE LABORATORY VERSUS THE CHURCH

STANDING in the observation tower of the Empire State Building in New York City, I was able to fulfill a long-cherished wish. I had purchased my ticket and been lifted by three elevators to the glass-enclosed tower of the highest man-made structure. From this pinnacle I looked down some twelve hundred feet upon a seething humanity—a cross section of the great metropolis. I imagined myself to be Lemuel Gulliver watching tiny Lilliputians, for from here the automobiles looked like toys, and men moved along like ants. Out on the Hudson River, ocean liners were being pushed and towed by tugs, while overhead a passenger plane droned toward La Guardia Field.

As I watched the panorama, my eyes saw a small grimy building hemmed in on three sides by skyscrapers. It was a church lifting its steeple through the smoke and shadows toward the ethereal blue. Here was a contrast that caught my imagination as I interpreted it in terms of life. Below me lay an ever-moving throng of humanity living and dying in this world of steel, electricity, machines, science, and complexity. In the heart of this civilization stood an old church, the emblem of religion, challenging the order of the day. At one time the church had stood out above its surroundings; but the encroaching structures of twentieth-century business had dwarfed this symbol of the spiritual.

Was this emblematic, I questioned, of what modern science has done to religion? Are the values which the church has represented for two thousand years to be crushed and destroyed by modern life? Is science, the prime instrument in creating this and other metropolitan centers, able to supply man's every need without religion?

We live in what is termed a "scientifically-minded age," which means nothing more than man's desire for proved knowledge rightly organized and studied. It is the attempt to obtain experimental facts for all things that are believed. Indeed, the valuable knowledge that scientists have discovered has enlarged the conception of our world and the universe. Go back into the Middle Ages when Tycho Brahe, the first modern descriptive astronomer, studied the heavens to find the system of planets and suns. The German, Johannes Kepler, was formulating laws concerning the motions of the planets, and Galileo Galilei invented a stronger telescope which revealed the mountains and valleys on the moon. About a half century later Isaac Newton discovered additional facts which allowed him to announce more laws of the heavens. These men were discovering the facts of the natural world and its relation to the universe.

In other important fields science was pushing its experiments. There was the invention of the barometer by Torricelli and Pascal in the seventeenth century. A doctor was giving the first understandable view of how the blood circulates through the body; he was the English physician, Dr. William Harvey. Michael Faraday was showing that electric currents produce a magnetic field, a fact which would lead to

Life Begins With God

the invention of the dynamo. Nor should the names of Pasteur, Lister, Jenner, or Simpson be forgotten among the heroic scientists who led man toward safer living through modern medical science. Some men tested their theories even unto death in order that life might be safer for humanity.

But with the increase of knowledge there arose a speculative phase of science which brought dangerous conclusions. Men will sometimes create imaginative theories and declare them to be facts. Again, the "scientific attitude" has led some individuals to say they will not believe anything which cannot be proved before their eyes. But there are many everyday experiences in life that require faith. Tom eats a slice of bread with good faith. He never saw it made, but he believes the baker put good flour and yeast into the loaf. John will talk to his friend over the telephone although he does not see him and cannot prove the voice to be that of his chum. Yet this same youth will scoff at a man who believes in God and in a religious life, saying, "Why do you believe in superstitions which you cannot prove?" It is this so-called "scientific attitude" which comes into the classroom and halls of high schools and colleges to destroy the faith of our future leaders. Science has no right to make thrusts against the basic faith of man's religion. The experimental laboratory is reaching beyond its limits when it robs men and women of faith in God.

Beyond science there is a spiritual reality which men must take by faith, and this fervent hope answers the deepest yearnings of the heart. No man can analyze love, and the laboratory cannot tell you why two young people fall in love and accept the precious relationship through life as man and wife; yet it happens every day. It is in the realm where science cannot make an answer, for it is an inner, spiritual experience incapable of scientific reports. When a man faces death there is no consolation in the laboratory analysis which declares that although a man dies and his organic functions cease, the chemical elements of the body remain. NO, there are crises everyone must face for which no scientific answer can be given, and no material consolation can be received. It is in these more intense and solemn moments that faith in a living God alone will suffice.

Science stands helpless to appreciate the beautiful experiences in your life and mine. Of a sublime poem or a majestic symphony we can only say with the poet:

"The glorious riddle of his rhythmic breath,
His might, his spell, we know not what they be:
We only feel, whatever he uttered,
This savors not of death,
This hath a relish of eternity." [1]

Can we go into the physics laboratory with a master violinist and dissect the beauty of Fritz Kreisler's compositions? The physicist will tell us how many vibrations a note is producing, he will talk of sound and pitch; but it is impossible for him to tell us why the haunting melody will bring tears or ecstasy to the listener.

Again, we may drive to the rim of Crater Lake in southern Oregon, and look down at this breathtaking wonder of nature. The geologist at our side will tell us how this basin was once the base of a high mountain peak. The physicist is able to measure the length, breadth, and depth of the lake, and to estimate the amount of water in the mammoth bowl. But is this all there is to Crater Lake? Is it merely a mass of scientific data? No! Here is the majesty and beauty of gigantic cliffs, magic islands on a mirror of sapphire blue, clouds scudding overhead reflecting phantom ships on a placid sea. Only a poet can interpret this eternal beauty; science cannot grasp the aesthetic wonder and appreciation within the soul of man.

Thus, life is not merely a series of mental and chemical reactions which the psychologist and chemist may interpret. Human beings are endowed with spiritual longings which are answered by faith in God and in the resulting religious belief. Truly man cannot live by bread alone; he longs for a solution to the deep questions of his soul. These answers must come as the result of long search and living faith.

The word of God does not disagree with proved scientific facts, although the Bible is not written as a textbook on science. It is when men begin to speculate concerning the origin of this earth and the life upon it; it is when they attempt to set forth their hypotheses as scientific fact that the Bible disagrees. What is the proper place of science in the mind of man? Does science have even its limitations? A scientist may rightfully ask: "What is its object?" "What is its composition, structure, and purpose?" "What makes it go?" "How does it live?" On the other hand it is to religion that we must go for answers to such problems as "Why am I in the world?" "Who is the Supreme Power to whom I owe my life and my allegiance?" "Where do I go after this life?" "What is my relation to my universe and to my fellow men?" Science searches for life facts; religion interprets those facts for man's true happiness and ultimate goal.

Life Begins With God

All that has been written concerning evolution is without experimental proof, and, therefore, only human speculation. Dr. Edwin G. Conklin of Princeton University writes: If there is no purpose in the universe, then there is no God, and no good. No one can furnish scientific proof of the existence or nature of God; but atheism leads to fatalism and despair, while theism leads to faith and hope and love.” [2] Weigh this scholarly conclusion with care. Dr. Conklin points out that the fruit of man’s belief is, perhaps, the greatest test of its value. God’s existence must be taken by faith, and when so taken it leads to all that is high and noble in this life. Denial of God leads to doubt and ultimate despair.

If youth accepts the theory of evolution instead of the divine account of creation, he will be led to deny that there is a God of the Christian religion. For if you cannot believe the Bible, what basis have you for your faith? In accepting evolution you must deny a divine Plan or purpose in the universe, in the world, and in the life of human beings, for the logical conclusion must be that over millions or billions of years (as far as the evolutionary scientists are concerned, you may take your choice) suns, planets, and life “just happened.” To accept the theory that the entire universe evolved out of nothing by no power of a divine Creator requires far more credulity than to accept the Scriptures with sincere faith. Our universe did not just happen.

If you saw a pile of logs balanced precariously, you might reasonably believe that it might fall and happen to crush a woodsman; but it is ridiculous to attempt to convince any man that Radio City of the National Broadcasting Company, with its studios, control rooms, miles of intricate cables and delicate connections, all originated by mere chance. You could never make a sensible man believe that a printing press, an automobile, or a beautiful watch evolved without a designer and creator; yet some minds are continually declaring that it is “scientific” to believe that all living things, this world, and this universe simply sprang from thin air. If you would see the divine law acting in the everyday experiences, “Go forth, under the open sky, and list To nature’s teachings.”

Go to the eyepiece of a great telescope. Study the photographic plates that have been made of the heavenly bodies; realize that tens of thousands of gigantic suns are whirling through space at a speed as great as that of a sixteen inch projectile from a battleship, and you will be amazed at the order of the heavens. “How often do they meet and crash?” you ask. The answer of the astronomer is, “Never.” Perfect law rules the suns and systems. Mathematics in its most exacting calculations is revealed in the computations of astronomers. The shepherd poet truly declared:

“The heavens are telling the glory of God,
And the sky shows forth the work of His hands.
Day unto day pours forth speech,
And night unto night declares knowledge.” [3]

You must reject the Bible and its teachings of Christianity if you will follow the evolutionary theory to its logical conclusion. If God did not create the world in six days and place all living creatures and man upon it, why should we believe the third chapter of Genesis? If Genesis 1 and 2 are not valid, then what is truth? If you reject the origin of sin in the experience of Adam and Eve, what proof have you that there is such a thing as sin. If there is no sin, then there is no need for a Savior who came to “save His people from their sins.” According to this view, there is no hope in Jesus Christ, no promise of His return, no basis for the resurrection, and no assurance of a future life. Certainly such a young man or young woman will be without hope and “without God.”

“But,” says a student, “we can’t have faith in our materialistic age. We must prove all things. I can’t harmonize God and science. I can’t have faith.” The same weakness of the present generation is depicted in parable by Ambrose Bierce in this manner:

“Whose dead body is that?”

“Credulity’s.”

“By whom was he slain?”

“Credulity.”

“Ah, suicide.”

“No, surfeit. He dined at the table of science, and swallowed all that was set before him.”

No better principle is there for contemporary thinkers to take than that illustrated by the allegory: You can swallow too much of “so-called science.” Destruction of faith will lead us to a scorching desert of despair where there is no oasis of hope and faith.

Faith cannot be separated from life. When you attempt to abolish all belief in a Supreme Being,

Life Begins With God

you are like the boy who sawed off the limb of the tree on which he was sitting. Your whole philosophy crashes because you have nothing to cling to in life. The basis of all Christian thinking is faith, for “whoever would approach God must have faith in His existence.” [4] Science cannot prove that a God exists, so men of the laboratory declare; but you can prove that He lives by the experience in your own soul.

The Bible reveals a personal God who upholds all things by His power. This is the true origin of the law of gravitation, and of the laws of planetary motion. God knows man’s life; He rules in the affairs of men. Yes, even the thoughts of men are laid bare unto Him. Said the psalmist:

“Thou has searched me and known me, O Lord.
Thou knows when I sit down and when I stand up.
Thou discerned my thought from afar.” [5]

Therefore it is possible for the Bible to answer the problems which science can never touch. The earth was not made without design; God declares it was created “for a dwelling place.”

When the facts which science reveals are placed beside the Bible, there is no conflict. My relationship to the Christian church needs never to be antiquated by human knowledge. The modern English poet, Alfred Noyes, has paraphrased the faith and words of Sir Isaac Newton, a true scientist who could see God in the natural laws. In “Watchers of the Sky” the poet has Newton speak these words:

“What is all science, then, But pure religion, seeking everywhere The true commandments, and through many forms The eternal power that binds all worlds in one? It is man’s age-old struggle to draw near His Maker, learn His thoughts, discern His law! A boundless task, in whose infinitude, As in the unfolding light and law of love, Abide our hope and our eternal joy.” [6]

Certain it is that we live in a generation weak in faith; but we can find truth. Honest doubt can be respected, for it must be remembered that one of Jesus Christ’s twelve apostles was a doubter; but, like Thomas, the honest skeptic seeks for truth to dispel his lack of faith. As Donald Hankey has courageously put it: “True religion is betting one’s life there is a God.” [7] Are you willing to risk your life on that faith? Can science take the place of the noblest, richest, and truest thoughts and actions of life? Can science bring comfort and healing to broken hearts? Does science reach beyond the grave?

When you have counted all things and reached the complex definitions which scientists in the laboratories have discovered, you will not have reached God; and you never can find in the modern world anything that will substitute for a personal, loving heavenly Father. Test religion in your own test tube of life. Don’t come to the end as many modems will, pictured by A. E. Housman, when they have research, knowledge, and materialism, but no hope.

“Now hollow fires burn out to black,
And lights are guttering low.
Square your shoulders, lift your pack,
And leave your friends and go.

“Oh, never fear, man naught to dread.
Look not left nor right.
In all the endless road you tread
There’s nothing but the night.” [8]

Life does not begin with science, life does not end with science. The Christian life begins with God, and it continues with God in a new heaven and a new earth.

5. THE GUIDEBOOK FOR ADVENTURERS

HE LAY on the operating table as white-clad doctors and nurses worked skillfully to save his life. It was a delicate operation, and a famous brain surgeon was attempting to relieve the pressure on the young man’s brain -an injury caused by an automobile crash. In a room below, the family sat in tense anguish awaiting the moment-it seemed an eternity-when a message would come from the surgery.

This was the setting of an episode in a well-known radio program of American family life. Here

Life Begins With God

was depicted a crisis in the lives of home folk. They were linked together by love, yet suddenly plunged into the depths of tragedy. The silence became intense, and then the oldest son of the stunned father suggested that the greatest need of each member of the home in that hour was the thought of eternal beauty. At first the family rebelled against such a proposal. Why should they think of beauty in the shadow of death? Because, he replied, the spiritual power from beauty and truth is the greatest answer to the sorrow of a human heart.

In the stillness of the room the son began reciting a poem which he declared had been his strength when flying over the battle lines during the World War: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." And when he had spoken the final words, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever," the group seemed to have caught the confidence and trust which are found in this simple truth. The modern writer of this story acknowledged the greatest source of eternal beauty and truth—the Bible.

Every problem of human beings has its solution in God's library of sixty-six books, and from it God speaks to the lonely heart. The conflict between the spirit and the flesh was never greater than it is today for youth. When faced with the compromise between purity and lax morality, why not find courage in the life of Joseph? As you read of his adventures in the first book of the Scriptures you will see a youth in a foreign land. Watch him advance from common slavery to a position of trust in the house of Potiphar. In his prosperity he is tempted by his master's wife to compromise his purity and integrity. Hear his answer to the evil woman: "How then can I commit this great crime, and sin against God?" It is the unwavering standard of this young man which eventually leads him from unjust imprisonment to the position of prime minister in the Egyptian Empire. His obedience to God's standard is an example for Christian youth in a careless, sinful generation.

Do you ever feel that you have been unfairly treated by the wheel of fortune? Perhaps you cannot secure the position you have been educated to fill, or you are crowded out of work by economic conditions. What can you do? Will you do your best in your place in the world's work, or will you rebel against it all? For your encouragement turn to 2 Kings 5 and read the life of a Jewish maiden carried as a captive into Syria and placed in the menial tasks of an army general's household. She might have sulked against the merciless treatment of being exiled from her home, her family, and her people. But no, instead of hating Naaman, her lord, she told him of the prophet Elisha in Israel who could heal the vile disease of leprosy. The sick general believed the words of this servant, he went to the prophet, and returned with health restored. A spirit of loving service made this insignificant slave girl worthy of mention in a chapter of the Bible.

If the spirit of a materialistic age tempts you to cast aside religious devotion, it is time for you to read the experiences of Daniel. An official in a foreign government, Daniel continues to worship his God in the face of intolerant decrees and jealous, spying enemies. Although Daniel's decision for right led him to the lions' den, he came out the next morning victorious through his allegiance to God. From the pit echoed his words to the Oriental monarch: "My God has sent His angel, and has shut the mouths of the lions, so that they have not injured me; because I was found innocent before Him, and before you also, O king, have I done no injury." [1]

These are samples of the significant human experiences from the Book of books which throw the light of inspiration upon man's life. If, you are discouraged, it is appropriate for you to read how God dealt with David when he committed heinous crimes. Never again is there need to feel that your sins cannot be forgiven, after reading 2 Samuel 12, for there we see the evils of David's life forgiven after the king has made complete repentance and confession. Turn to the most beautiful words ever heard by a dying sinner, the thief on the cross, as Jesus Christ spoke the promise of salvation to him. [2]

The Bible is not just a great literary work, it is not merely another book; it is a reference guide for humanity, it is the volume filled with instructions from God to lead man from sin and death to eternal truth and love.

In the Library of Congress is a carefully guarded case containing the most valuable book in the world. In 1930 Congress appropriated \$1,500,000 to buy the Vollbehr collection of fifteenth-century books, and the most important volume in this small library was a copy of the Gutenberg Bible, the most costly piece of printing on earth. It is reputed to be worth a million dollars today. This Book of books is one of the three perfect copies in existence that were printed by Johannes Gutenberg in 1455. It is now the paramount treasure of the millions of books in the Library of Congress. Could any book be more precious to man than the Bible? No other work contains a living message for every race, no other writing claims to be the direct communication of God to men. There are many standards for the acceptance of the Scriptures. Some men will consider them as nothing more than a valuable study in literary forms, and, indeed, the Bible contains

Life Begins With God

masterpieces of poetry, prose, and drama; others are willing to believe that this enduring Book contains some valuable lessons for our age. But the sincere Christian who accepts the teachings of Jesus Christ and follows His words must accept the entire Bible as inspired. You cannot straddle the fence by saying that some portions of the Scriptures are divinely given and some portions are of human origin.

Call to witness the statement of the Master to the Jews who had read and studied the Old Testament, but who had never discerned the true import of the prophecies of the Messiah. To these leaders Jesus said, "These very Scriptures testify to Me, yet you refuse to come to Me for life. [3] It was of the Old Testament He specifically spoke, for the New Testament had not yet been penned. Paul, writing from the underground dungeon in Rome, had not lost faith in God or the divine word. In his last letter, when he was about to face the execution block, he wrote these inspired words. "All Scripture is divinely inspired, and useful in teaching, in reproof, in correcting faults, and in training in uprightness, so that the man of God will be adequate, and equipped for any good work." [4]

Even as Jesus Christ was divinity clothed with humanity, so God's message was spoken to devout men, and they wrote His words in language all might understand. It is fitting that the words should be written in the most beautiful literary form, for God's truth should be in language as perfect as is the philosophy it presents. Therefore, God spoke through prophets and holy men, using them as His secretaries. Peter explains the process by saying, "Under the influence of the Holy Spirit men spoke for God." [5]

It would be impossible for fallible men to harmonize their thoughts in the sixty-six books of this sacred library. From Moses, living some fifteen hundred years before Christ was born, to the beloved John, writing some sixty years after Christ ascended into heaven, men of different races, tongues, and cultures wrote on widely varying themes; yet all their thoughts fit into one perfect record. During this time five great civilizations were upon the stage of history; but the Bible maintains the same truths from Genesis to Revelation. The first chapter opens with the epic words, "In the beginning God," and the last chapter closes with a divine benediction, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." The Eden of Genesis is seen in its restored beauty for the redeemed in the Paradise of Revelation.

A golden thread leads through the Old Testament to Jesus Christ. The New Testament tells the story of the Redeemer and points forward to Jesus Christ's second advent. The center of the Bible is the cross of Christ. Without Him it would be only a book! The Bible is likened to a beautiful mosaic, for when the pieces have been fitted together one is forced to exclaim, "Behold the Man!" The Master's own words, prophetically revealed, were, "In the volume of the Book it is written of Me."

No man can read a book without taking some influence into his life from the pages. Frequently we read of youth attempting crimes after having read detective tales or crime novels. As evil may be brought into life from malicious books, even so may good come to the life of the individual who reads volumes with high and noble principles. How much greater can the Bible influence our thought and action because it has been given through divine inspiration! The character of God's word is transmitted to human lives, and what transformations result!

The word is pure, it is holy, and it is righteous. The sacred pages show God's hatred of sin and His love for the sinner. His eternal law and justice are brought to the mind of man; but as we read we need not be discouraged, for His plan of salvation, proclaiming His love, shines as a light upon man's pathway ahead. A blueprint for the Christian is found in every page. If you would live after the pattern set by the Galilean, study His life and words; read the Book whose center and circumference is Jesus.

What shall it avail us if the Bible be the inspired word of God, but we fail to incorporate its teachings in our lives? The pity of it is that though it is recognized and eulogized as the Book of books, too few individuals bear the imprint of its teachings in their character. It was Jeremiah, the prophet, who described his own acceptance of the Scriptures in these words, "As for me, Thy word is my joy and delight; for I bear Thy name, O Lord, God of hosts!" [6] Whose name is identified with your character and mine? The foundation of Christian doctrine must be the Bible, and the young man or the young woman who has decided to build his life upon religious principles must lay the cornerstone upon Scripture. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." [7]

This present age needs a blood transfusion to save the faith, the courage, and the moral principles of human character; for as realists have looked upon a chaotic and troubled civilization they are fearful in heart. The modern higher critic has produced a pernicious anemia in man's spiritual life. He has had little reverence for religious truth. Indeed, he would "peep and botanize upon his mother's grave." [8] The living story of the cross of Christ, the cleansing blood of the Savior, must come into the hearts of men or they are lost. The Bible alone is the source of this life-renewing stream. The reason men have scoffed at the Bible is that they have never studied it with the hope of finding in it the answers to their perplexities. Youth has had

Life Begins With God

very little incentive to study and know the word of God since secular reading, irreligious homes, amusements, and school studies without the Bible have been their environment. I was standing on the steps of a university building not long ago talking with a graduate student who declared himself to be an agnostic.

“Have you ever taken time to read the Bible thoroughly for yourself?” I asked.

“Not exactly,” was his evasive answer; “but I have read what many critics say about it.”

Is that sound scholarship?” I asked him. “You would not do that to a great work of literature such as ‘Paradise Lost’ or a Shakespearean play, would you?”

He admitted that it was not a sound method of study. He was a young scholar of the twentieth century who knew what men had written against the Bible, but he had never studied it for himself. I suggested three steps for his approach to the Bible: First, make individual search and study of the Scriptures. The Bible cannot be read as a simple storybook. Its depth of thought and breadth of subject matter have never been exhausted. Second, think on these things with a sincere heart. Third, compare and analyze passage with passage until you know the complete truth on a subject.

If you would read the Bible to find its treasures, go to its pages daily. Perhaps you will read it from cover to cover in a year; many people find a great blessing in such a systematic study. Or, you may go through the Bible searching for every promise of God to man. You may read all the biographies of the Bible, and see how these men accomplished God’s plan for their lives, or why they failed to do great deeds as they turned to their own selfish desires. If you love literature then you can study all the historical books, all the poetry, all the prophecy, and all the letters according to their form. But, in whichever way you read, search first for the personal message of God to your heart.

If the Bible is a lamp to our path in a despairing world, it will guide us to Jesus, the light of life. We will find the surety of the word proved to us as we read the prophecies written a hundred, five hundred, or a thousand years before the prediction was fulfilled. We will find the Bible to be accurate as we compare its history with archaeological discoveries. And we must remember that there are many unfulfilled prophecies for today and for the future that we may know if we search diligently with divine guidance.

The American poet Whittier wrote concerning the Bible in these poetic words:

“We search the world for truth, we cull
The good, the pure, the beautiful
From graven stone and written scroll;
From all old flower fields of the soul;
And, weary seekers of the best,
We come back laden from our quest
To find that all the sages said
Is in the Book our mothers read.” [9]

Only when men and women cease to care for life will the Bible be out of date, for within its pages is the cure for what Stanley Jones has called “the three great oppressions,” sin, suffering, and death. The remedy for man’s sin is in the life and death of Jesus Christ; the cure for the suffering in the world is found in God’s love; and the solution for the terror of death is found only in the eternal promise of everlasting life.

Passengers traveling upon steamships which carry on the traditions of the sea will occasionally find the boat swinging around in a complete circle. This is known in nautical terms as “to swing ship,” and the movement is made in order that the ship’s compass may be checked for accuracy at each of the four points of the compass, and any necessary allowance made for deviations. As the captain at the helm of his vessel must take this traditional precaution to know that his compass will mark a true course, so it is imperative that the young mariner, as he voyages forth on life’s sea, know that the compass of his life is true. Test your guiding instrument; is it directing you to the port of your soul? The Bible is the perfect compass for your life.

“O young Mariner, Down to the haven, Call your companions, Launch your vessel, And crowd your canvas, And, ere it vanishes Over the margin, After it, follow it, Follow the Gleam.” [10]

Life Begins With God

6. WHAT CAN A MAN BELIEVE?

“THE Transfiguration” by Raphael, one of the master paintings in the Vatican at Rome, presents two powerful scenes of contrast. The upper portion of the canvas depicts the glorified Savior radiating light, life, and glory -it is the transfiguration. The lower half of the picture shows the demoniac boy and his sorrowing parents with the disciples shrouded in blackness, despair, and doubt. The eyes of the suffering one are turned toward the impotent servants of Christ, while just above them is the answer to every problem of life- the Son of God. One look of faith would set everything right, but the helpless one fails to raise his eyes.

The world staggers on today without the upward vision. Never was unbelief so popular, so deep, and so radical. Let any statement be made among a group of Americans concerning the value of religion, and someone is certain to cry out, I doubt it!” Large sections of our citizenry are flaunting a disbelief of God. Youth is willing to take a Ring at tradition-smashing any day in the week.

“Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul. When hot for certainties in this our life.” [1]

“Debunking” the traditional facts of history has become a favorite twentieth-century pastime. We are told that Robert Fulton did not invent the steamboat that Alexander Bell was not the first man to know the principles of the telephone, and that Samuel Morse was not the originator of the telegraph. We learn that Johannes Gutenberg did not invent printing, and Columbus never actually discovered America. No wonder we are puzzled at our topsy-turvy world and say, ‘What can I believe?’

“The old order changes, yielding place to new.” What could be said of the first half of the twentieth century? New styles and amazing inventions make the vogues of yesterday as antique as museum pieces. Boundaries of nations shift overnight, novel theories of economics sprout like mushrooms, a new deal in politics has been the goal of statesmen, and modernism is shouted from the pulpit. We become what Will Durant terms “fragments of men and nothing more.”

“Why should I believe the teachings of the Bible?” asks one. “My rule is to treat all men as I want to be treated. That’s enough for me. Why talk about faith in creeds or doctrines?” Perhaps this is a valid question. At least it is a popular one, for Dr. Norman Woefel, in a study of religious trends, finds that traditional Christianity has become “almost completely irrelevant today,” and “the last thing that would interest modern youth is the salvaging of the Christian religion.”

Too many young people have been tutored by agnostics who cry, I don’t know; therefore, I doubt it!” The need of doctrines and confessions of faith has been brushed aside by ministers. Here is the statement of a noted clergyman concerning Christian belief. “You can hold any opinion you like about God; you can believe what you like, as long as you make friendship the touchstone of your relationship with God, as long as you make loyalty to your father and mother one of the articles of your creed, as long as you stand foursquare in all the mighty movements of this confused hour.”

You don’t need a creed yet you do need a creed is the summary of this clergyman. Man does not require doctrines of faith, but he must have articles of a “creed” if he would stand “foursquare” in this hour. Is this not queer logic? Certainly there is no vital Christianity without a belief in the message of Jesus Christ.

What are the elements composing the Christian religion? First, there is the conduct of life. Here is the hardest requirement for many a professed follower of the Master. A Brahman once said to his Christian friend, I have found you out, You are not as good as your Book. If you Christians were as good as your Book, you would in five years conquer India.” There is no fault to be found with the teachings of the Savior. The weakness is in the men and women who follow afar off. “This is the way we can be sure that we are in union with Him; whoever says, ‘I am always in union with Him’ must live just as He lived.” [2]

But the conduct of a follower of the Galilean must be established upon the second foundation of the Christian religion, a belief in a personal God. I cannot offer a sincere prayer of thanksgiving or make an honest plea for protection and guidance unless I affirm my confidence in my heavenly Father. “For whoever would approach God must have faith in His existence and in His willingness to reward those who try to find Him.” [3]

When someone says, I do not know that there is a God and I cannot believe,” he has not studied the two divine books-the Bible and nature. The “Psalm of Assurance” expresses the poet’s hunger for the Almighty:

“As a deer longs for the watercourses, So my whole being longs for Thee, O God. My whole being

Life Begins With God

thirsts for God, for the living God: How long till I come and see the face of God? My tears have been my food day and night, While men say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?' [4]

Rudyard Kipling lay seriously ill with a burning fever. For days it seemed that the racking disease would end his life. One morning the nurse bent over the patient and asked, "Mr. Kipling, what do you want?" Feebly came back the words from the parched lips, I want God."

What more beautiful figure could be used than to declare Jesus Christ to be the Word of God! The Word was made flesh and lived tangibly among men. In other words, the attributes of the Father became perfect action in the life of His Son. The disciple Philip asked the Master to show him God. Jesus replied, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you, Philip, have not recognized Me? Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father." [5]

The Almighty is "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and fidelity, showing kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity. [6] God is love. His power is eternal, omnipotent, and sufficient for the needs of the weakest soul. As I study the Bible I hear Him speaking to me. As I accept God and fix my faith upon Him, I find spiritual power. I feel as did Tolstoy, I remembered that I only lived at those times when I believed in God."

The words of H. G. Wells in his book *God the Invisible King* appeal to me as worthy of any man's consideration and acceptance. "God is a person who can be known as one knows a friend, who can be served and who receives services. God is no abstraction nor trick of words. He is as real as a bayonet thrust or an embrace." [7] When we grasp the character of the heavenly Father and understand the plan of salvation we must be constrained to act upon that knowledge and accept that divine love.

The message of eternal truth is the third essential of Christianity. An understanding of the teachings of Jesus Christ is necessary if men would live as He did. Many youth spurn the doctrines of the Bible because they fail to see them lived in the lives of church members. But this does not mean that the creed of Jesus is faulty. Emerson well said, "A man's action is only the picture book of his creed."

When the Bible convicts a man, he begins to live the principles he has discovered. Augustine recounts the experience of a Roman senator, Victorinus, who was a lover of books. At last the Scriptures came into his hands, he read them, and felt their power over him. He said to his friends in confidence, I am now a Christian at heart." But no one could see any change in his life. He attempted to hide his faith, but his heart burned with the conviction of the doctrines. He was forced to act. He broke from the chains of paganism to follow the Man of Calvary. The word of God taken into his mind as a vital force, had transformed the senator's life. In this pagan Roman was fulfilled Christ's promise, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free!"

"But I can't see any reason for having a religious creed, persists one youth. "When the average church member I know never lives up to what his church teaches, why should I study doctrines?" I must answer that there is nothing more worthless than a creed not lived. In fact, there is no value in having tenets of religion unless they transform the life by changing it from a sinful course to the way of righteousness.

No knowledge is effective unless it is put into creative thought and action. Imagine a man completing the study of medicine. but refusing to minister to the sufferings of the sick. Of what value is his learning? What profit is there in knowing the science of cooking, dietetics, and interior decorating if the girl who learns these things never prepares meals or arranges her home? A student of chemistry learns the principles and formulas from textbooks. Then he puts his theoretical knowledge to the test in laboratory experiments. Likewise the Christian studies the Scriptures which contain the science of God, and when he has found the truths, he puts them into practice in the laboratory of his everyday living.

James clearly explains the relation between creed and conduct in these words: "For anyone who merely listens to the message without obeying it is like a man who looks in a mirror at the face that nature gave him, and then goes off and immediately forgets what he looked like. But whoever looks at the faultless law that makes men free and keeps looking, so that he does not just listen and forget, but obeys and acts upon it, will be blessed in what he does." [8]

No greater testimony of Christian faith has been uttered than Paul's words from the dungeon in Rome. "This is why I am suffering as I am, but I am not ashamed of it, for I know whom I have trusted and I am sure that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day." [9]

When we know God we can accept the counsel He proffers us. Millenniums have elapsed since the Ten Commandments were given to Israel from the rugged heights of Mount Sinai; but the principles remain eternal. Jesus taught the observance of the law and He kept it. Are we afraid to believe what He affirmed to be truth? In His inaugural Sermon on the Mount, the Master said: "Do not suppose that I have come to do away with the law or the prophets. I have not come to do away with them but to enforce them. For I tell

Life Begins With God

you, as long as heaven and earth endure, not one dotting of an I or crossing of a T will be dropped from the law until it is all observed.” [10]

The Decalogue is a blueprint of action; it is not a list of prohibitions. No man is saved by keeping the Ten Commandments; ‘but if we love God, we willingly conform our actions to His Plan. With David we say,

“I delight to do Thy will, O my God. And Thy law is in my very heart.” [11]

To live the first four precepts in the law requires more than merely refraining from worshipping idols, taking God’s name in vain, or working on the Sabbath day. Jesus magnified the commandments by declaring: “You must love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole soul, and your whole mind.” [12] Here is positive Christian action. The duty of a follower of the Master is not fulfilled to his fellow mortals when he says, I have not lied, murdered, committed adultery, stolen, or coveted anything of my neighbor’s.” This would be a religion of restraint. Christ epitomized the complete view of service in these words: “You must love your neighbor as you do yourself.” [13]

No young man or woman needs to be puzzled over a religious creed. Evaluate the message of Jesus Christ by putting it to the acid test in your own experience. If a faith in God purifies your soul of cynicism and bitterness; if it gives you vision, happiness, and faith, what greater answer do you need for belief?

“Go put your creed into your deed,
Nor speak with double tongue.”

In this epigram from Emerson is a challenge to test the doctrines of religion by action. If you have hungered for a knowledge of God, if you have searched sincerely and listened willingly to the still small voice, you are at the end of your quest. God’s love and peace will radiate from your soul. To have a creedless life is to exist as an intellectual jellyfish. Behind the present-day revulsion against creed and dogma is the desire to cast off all restraint.

This modern philosophy is similar to the views expressed by a twelve-year-old youngster I overheard on the way to school recently. To his chum he said: “I’ll show the teacher today that nobody is going to tell me what I can’t do. Yesterday I had to sit in the corner all morning; but if I want to, I’m going to sit right down in the middle of the floor today, and I’d like to see her make me get up.”

Moral and spiritual anarchists cast aside the belief in the Bible and the teachings of Jesus Christ. They do not want to be held accountable for the deeds of their body. They cannot endure sound doctrine. Men say, I want to consider nothing but the love of Christ and the brotherhood of men. I refuse to think about Bible creed.” That is as logical as if we looked at a new building being erected on the main street of the city and should say “The brick and marble which face that structure are beautiful. It is silly to think of cold steel and rivets in such a skyscraper. Nothing, counts but the outer finish.”

Behind every godly life there is a belief in the word of God. The love, meekness, gentleness, mercy, faith, and courage that are seen in a Christian are the outer marble and brick of a soul temple which has within it the steel girders of Christ’s teachings and the rivets of a “Thus said the Lord. Paul wrote to young Timothy in words apropos for the twentieth century. “For a time will come, said the apostle, “when they will not listen to wholesome instruction, but will overwhelm themselves with teachers to suit their whims and tickle their fancies, and they will turn from listening to the truth and wander off after fictions.” [14]

With God’s help I can accept His word, trust Him as a loving heavenly Father, and live the life He patterns for me. This is walking with God. It is the undeniable proof of true religion!

7. IS SIN A MYTH?

BANK robbery! Kidnapping! Read all about it! Extra, extra!” The shout of the freckled-faced urchin on the crowded downtown street corner attracted my friend’s attention. Turning to me with a cynical smile, Frank said, “It’s only another chapter in the continued story of crime. The world is full of criminals, kidnapers, and murderers. Tell me, since you believe the Bible, how you accept the fact that so many people are born to be bad? Every criminal proves to me there isn’t a God or He wouldn’t create such evil

Life Begins With God

beings.”

“So that’s the basis of your doubt, is it, Frank?”

“Well, perhaps to a degree. I’m a realist enough to know that sin isn’t a myth. The government knows it is not a fairy tale, either, for our nation spends millions of dollars every year to fight crime. How can a good God make evil people?”

“He does not.”

“Well, please explain how you can be consistent in your views.”

“Are you logical?” I asked of Frank. “Are you one who blames the automobile factory for the wrecks of automobiles you see when they have crashed in a head-on collision or smashed into a telephone pole?”

“Certainly not. One must blame the man at the wheel for his careless or drunken driving, not the manufacturer of the automobile. By the way, I see—”

“I knew you would, Frank, when I brought that analogy to your mind. You wouldn’t blame the man who made the automobile, and you must be equally fair with God. Blame the man at the wheel, as you say; don’t blame the Creator.”

Here was the ever-present fallacy of how a benevolent heavenly Father could create sinners and permit sin. Once more I turned to my companion. “Would you enjoy being a robot? Suppose you ate, talked, and thought only as your Maker compelled you to eat, or talk, or think; would you be happy?”

“I wouldn’t know the first principle of happiness. I would be a machine without will power or individuality.”

“Exactly, Frank, and God had to risk the possible entrance of sin and rebellion into His universe when He created beings with the power of choice. God originally made perfect beings; but man chose his own way, ran off the road and into the ditch, with resulting sin and ruin. Man was designed in the image of God; but as captain of his soul, he changed the pattern of his character. No man was created bad in the plan of his Maker.”

“But,” persisted Frank, “don’t you know science says we do things because our physical conditions make us react certain ways? If my glands are not functioning properly I may become a criminal. Don’t you believe in hereditary weaknesses?”

“Yes, science has found that many maladjusted lives are caused by physical defects or hereditary weakness. Those are the degenerating results of sin, which, by the way, the Bible declares will persist even to the third and fourth generation. But God promises to save to the uttermost anyone who comes to Him. If man wants redemption, no sin that he has committed can bar his return to his Father.”

As we continued talking, Frank revealed that his major premise was unsound, and this had caused him to think erroneously. He believed God created evil men. Such a statement is untrue. Sin cheated man of his heavenly birthright. God longs to give every soul eternal life; if man chooses sin he commits suicide.

Sin is not a myth as some modern thinkers would make us believe; sin and its consequences are older than the human race, and man-made plans or government projects cannot eradicate it. It is amazing to learn from the Bible that sin had its roots in heaven before the earth was created. Yes, evil is older than the world on which we live.

To find the origin of evil we must trace back into eternity to the time when the Sovereign God was a coworker with His Son, Jesus Christ the Word. In the beginning the Word existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was divine. It was He that was with God in the beginning. Everything came into existence through Him, and apart from Him nothing came to be. [1] In the miracle of creating the universe, the planets, and all that existed on them, Jesus Christ worked with His Father. He brought the heavenly angels into being, “for it was through Him that everything was created in heaven and on earth, the seen and the unseen, angelic thrones, dominions, principalities, authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. [2]

The inhabitants of heaven were made not only by the Creator, but also for Him. God is love, and it was His desire to have His creatures love Him; as they loved Him they would desire to obey Him, for when love motivates a rational man he fulfills the wishes of the one he loves. But above all, love must be voluntary. The moment a stronger individual makes demands upon a weaker person, love is at an end. Can you imagine a father attempting to force his five-year-old son to love him by threatening to lash him with a whip? No machine can love, since love originates in beings with personality and character, in individuals who have the power of choice and of reason. Therefore, it was necessary for God to risk the revolt of the will of man. If this rebellion arose it would bring enmity against Him by the beings He had created.

The devil was never a part of God’s creation. Satan was a “self-made sinner;” and every evildoer

Life Begins With God

is a “self made man.” The biography of Lucifer is found in the Bible under the figure of the king of Tyre. Of him, God said: “You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom, and complete in beauty. You dwelt in Eden, the garden of God. You had a shield of every kind of precious stone, the ruby, topaz, and emerald, the beryl, onyx, and jasper, the sapphire, garnet, chrysolite, and gold; and on your clothing was a wealth of fine gold. On the day when you were created, I placed you with the guardian cherubim on the holy hill of God; and you walked amidst stones of fire.” Here is the biography of Satan that is seldom read. Here was a majestic angel, perfect in all his talents.

Now read of his tragic downfall: “You were perfect in your ways from the day when you were created, till guilt was discovered in you. Through the greatness of your trade you filled your mind with lawlessness, and you fell into sin; therefore I cast you out as a profane thing from the hill of God, and the guardian cherubim drove you from the midst of the stones of fire.” [3]

A question arises in someone’s mind, “If Satan was created perfect, how was it possible for him to sin?” Sin is the refusal of good, a rebellion from divine authority. Satan wanted his own way. He said “No” to God, and decided on a selfish and egotistical career. Rebellion filled his heart. The Bible speaks, “You were puffed up with pride through your beauty, you ruined your wisdom by reason of your splendor. [4]

There was only one subject Satan could talk about. Listen to his chatter; it centers in “I-I-I.

“You said to yourself,
‘The heavens will I scale;
Above the stars of God
Will I set up my throne;
I will sit on the mount of assembly, in the recesses of the north;
I will scale the heights of the clouds,
I will match the Most High.” [5]

In these eight lines is found the core of sin. When man attempts to match God, when he sets his puny knowledge against the Lord of the universe, he starts on a downward course of sin. The love of God and the love of self never harmonize. Love for God pulls men toward heaven; love for self draws men to hell. Lucifer’s decision was treason against the government of heaven; therefore open war had to be declared.

Heaven was the battlefield of that conflict. In Revelation 12:7-9 is the picture of the titanic struggle between the hosts of God and the third part of the angels of heaven who had joined in Satan’s revolt. Final defeat came to the rebels, “So the great dragon, the ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world, was hurled down to the earth, and his angels were hurled down with him.”

Why was the enemy not destroyed as soon as he was defeated? It would seem that the universe should be protected from this deceiver. But wait, two thirds of the angelic creatures, who were loyal to God, had always loved Him. They had not joined with Satan. If the Creator immediately blotted out Satan and his followers, the heavenly hosts might wonder if Satan was not right in rebelling against God. It might be said that God was a tyrant. How would they know for all time that Jehovah was merciful and just? Time must be given for the devil to demonstrate his counterfeit system; the controversy must be allowed to reach a final climax when Satan would bring about his own destruction, and, sad to say, the punishment of all who were duped by his lies.

From heaven the history of sin shifts to a new world wherein are found perfect created beings. Adam and Eve had been given the Garden of Eden as a domain, and from this paradise they were to go forth with their family to possess the entire earth. They had been taught the fundamental laws of the universe; they knew complete happiness would come from remaining in harmony with those divine principles. They could choose to go their selfish way and make a tragedy of their lives if they did not want God’s plan; but the consequences would bring sin and death.

Tragic was the decision of Eve and Adam. In the third chapter of Genesis is the only true account of the origin of evil. Disregarding the counsel of God, the human pair followed their own reasoning and lusts. They longed for knowledge equal to their Creator’s, they wanted elevation of self. Again it was I-I-I in the life.

When a man denies God, there is no way out of a world filled with war, poverty, scourges of disease, and lust for power. Modern literature reveals the philosophy of writers like Theodore Dreiser, who believes the world is “grim,” and the victims born into it have no escape. “Who was to straighten out the

Life Begins With God

matter of the unjust equipment with which most people began? Who was to give them strong minds in place of feeble ones? Where were they to get pure tendencies instead of impure ones, as the world looked on these things?" These rhetorical questions linger in Dreiser's mind and his only answer is, "There is no hope."

Hideous scars mar humanity. Visit an asylum for the insane and study the crazed, idiotic faces -the visage of sin. Within the gray walls of a federal prison or state penitentiary it is easy to see where the wages of sin have been humanly paid to many a writhing soul; and who knows what torture of conscience and guilt has been paid to the heart? Walk down the corridors of a hospital where one may look in at the open doors where disease tortures with pained, deformed bodies, and wrecked lives. Sin is no myth; its results disfigure the earth.

Men in a frenzy of demon possession snuff out the lives of fellow mortals. Look at the fragments of flesh and bone among the smoldering ruins of school buildings which have been bombed by enemy airplanes. Sin writes his name in gory letters of human blood. Creep down the dark alleys of a city's slums and watch the half-starved children crouch in dark hallways. Sin scrawls his mark over many a door! Stare into the morgue where the drunkard, the murdered wife, or the crushed child lies still. Your soul must cry out, "The penalty of sin is paid in death."

Where is the remedy for a heartbroken world? Has God forgotten the earth and all its millions who cry for surcease from sin, pain, and death? No! There was a signed pledge of redemption in the dwellings of God which was sealed before man sinned. The Father planned a road back for us if sin ever came into the experience of mortals. A sacrifice, the necessary atonement, was made from the foundation of the world.

But who must make the sacrifice? An angel from heaven might be sent to die for man? NO, that would be impossible, for the price of ransom must be met by God Himself. Therefore "God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, so that no one who believes in Him should be lost, but that they should all have eternal life." [6]

In one of the quaint Belgium towns there was a clock which struck the hours faithfully for years. The village depended upon the clock in the tower for the correct time. Then came a day when the hands stopped moving and the chimes refused to strike. Clockmakers were called to repair the mechanism; but no one seemed to be able to repair it. Days and months passed and the town possessed a useless timepiece. One day a traveler passing through the town stopped at the clock tower and asked the caretaker if he might see the machinery. Shaking his head slowly as if the request were futile, the old man led the stranger up the dusty stairs. For a few minutes the visitor tinkered with the cogs and wheels. Then he moved some screws, touched a lever, and behold! the clock began to run.

Soon the chimes struck the hour and the villagers ran to the tower in amazement. "Who are you?" they shouted. "How did you make the clock work?"

"It was not difficult for me to repair the clock, my good friends," replied the stranger. "Many years ago I made the clock. I should know how to repair it."

Jesus Christ, our Creator, knows how to re-create our lives if we follow His instructions. We must return to that point on the road of life where Eve left it. She refused to believe what God said, and chose the enticing lies of Satan. Man must first of all believe in Jesus Christ as his Redeemer.

A regeneration takes place in the life when the cleansing power of Christ comes into the hearts! Sin is destroyed.

If your sins be like scarlet,
Can they become white as snow? If they be red like crimson,
Can they become as wool?"

The answer for these two parallel questions is certain:

If you prove willing and obedient,
You shall eat the good of the land." [7]

If we give our wills into the control of God and obey the proved laws of a perfect universe, we shall receive eternal life. This is the road back. It means to let go of self; it means to let God guide our actions, thoughts, and ideals.

To accept Christ Jesus we must confess every sin and renounce selfishness which has been

Life Begins With God

fighting God. This is our part and God promises to do the rest: If we acknowledge our sins, He is upright and can be depended on to forgive our sins and cleanse us from everything wrong.” [8] If we believe and accept God’s part of the contract, we are free from “everything wrong.”

You say that this promise is difficult to accept. It is too good to be true, perhaps, but it is a fact. In mathematics we know that 2 plus 2 equals 4. That is a mathematical statement. Just so in the spiritual realm; God says, “Confess your sins. I will forgive you and cleanse you from them.” Here is a great spiritual fact. Will you accept it?

Dr. Joseph Sizoo recounts a strange custom of the Omaha Indians. When a boy in the tribe grew to be twelve years old he was brought before the chief and told he was about to become a man. At the end of the day the lad was given a bow, three arrows, and a pony. Then he was sent away from the camp for three days. No food was given him. He must make his way with bow and arrow, or go hungry. The last instruction was this: Every evening at sundown he must climb a high hill, and facing the setting sun, pray, Here, God, poor and needy, I stand.” Can we do more?

8. THE PIONEER OF LIFE

DAVY CROCKETT, Jim Bridger, William Clark, Meriwether Lewis, Marcus Whitman. Here are names to be reckoned with as one recounts the leaders who pushed toward the sunset when the nation was young. American history has produced the epic figure of the pioneer, the hardy man who dared Indian attacks, mountain torrents, burning desert heat, and treacherous mountain trails to carve a new nation in the wilderness. How we love the stories of the covered wagon days! Walt Whitman saw the poetic glory of the new frontier, of the men and women who pushed into it, when he traveled westward;

“Oh you youths, Western youths,
So impatient, full of action, full of manly pride and friendship,
Plain I see you Western youths, see you tramping with the foremost, Pioneers! O pioneers!

“Have the elder races halted?
Do they droop and end their lesson, wearied over there beyond the sea?
We take up the task eternal, and the burden and the lesson, Pioneers! O pioneers!” [1]

More than an adventurous spirit was essential in the men and women who faced the westward trek from the Mississippi River. Thousands of families turned back fainthearted and discouraged. It took stamina to cut the path through the frontier to Oregon or California. Many of the pioneers were youths who were ready to risk all for the reward at the end of the rainbow. Youth is always ready to attempt what the gray-haired fathers declare to be impossible. It is the young men who see visions of new lands, new machines, new social and political reforms, and new spiritual conquests.

With the American trail blazer in our memory, we may turn to the speech of Peter in Acts 3:14 in Moffatt’s translation, and read a sentence from his sermon: “The boon you asked was a murderer, and you killed the Pioneer of Life.” The apostle glorifies the mission of Jesus Christ by calling Him “the Pioneer of Life.” Visualize the Man of Nazareth, youthful, serious, about His Father’s business, facing the frontiers which barred a lost world from the kingdom of God. His purpose was to find a way back to God so that the prodigals of earth might not remain forever disinherited.

What were the frontiers that the Son of God struggled against? The wilderness of sin was filled with demons of Satan. All the way was marked by trials and sufferings. Jesus was the Pioneer of Life through the valley of the shadow.

Never have the barriers of evil been more perilous than they were when the Child of Mary was born in Bethlehem. Paganism, blinding men to right and glorifying depravity, led millions of souls into slavery, degradation, and eternal night. Take down the volumes on ancient Rome and read of society during the century before Jesus was born. No more ghastly headlines of crime could be written in any age. Among the writings you will find the plays of Seneca, a Latin author living from about 3B. C. to A. D. 65. This pagan wrote tragedies based upon the common sins of the day: incest, murder, bestial torture, cynicism, terrifying fate, and despair. Civilization tottered on the abyss where “sin had become a science, and vice was consecrated as a part of religion.”

Where could men find release from sin? The Creek philosophy, architecture, and sculpture could

Life Begins With God

not save humanity. The Roman legions conquering the world did not bring permanent peace or contentment. The Jewish religion had stagnated with forms and legalism. Man was without God and without hope. As Luther once said, the forgiveness of sin is *nodus Deo vindice dignus*, a knot that needs God's help to unravel. From the hills of Judea came an announcement of salvation:

“Glory to God in heaven and on earth!
Peace to the men He favors!” [2]

Was there not cause for rejoicing? “For today, in the town of David, a Savior for you has been born who is your Messiah and Lord.” [3] Born in a cattle stall without pomp and glory of earthly kings, the Lord came “to save His people from their sins.” [4]

Generals are remembered for their prowess in war. Philosophers are honored for thoughts they contribute to the human mind. Kings are enshrined for riches and conquests. Artists and sculptors are famous for the masterpieces they bequeath to culture. But Jesus Christ is worshiped for none of these achievements. He did not marshal armies; His followers were despised and imprisoned; His life was unnoticed for the first thirty years, and His public ministry lasted less time than a student spends in college. He died as a criminal, hated more by His own race than by the foreign soldiers who executed Him. Yet out of this paradoxical story has come the divine power to regenerate millions of lives. The course of empire was changed by the life and thought of this Teacher. History became His story!

Jesus Christ put a question to His disciples that has produced more discussion, more argument, and more profound study than any other. He simply asked, “Who do people say that the Son of man is?” Later in His ministry the Master answered the question by affirming, I am Way and Truth and Life. No one can come to the Father except through Me.” [5]

The Pioneer of Life found a Way for man to return to God. It was not a path without temptation, self-denial, and humility, for Jesus Christ was “tempted in every way just as we have, without committing any sin.” [6] He knows the pull of sin; He knows where the dangerous quick sands of temptation are hidden; He knows how heavy the burdens grow as one climbs the trail, for He made the Way that we might come after Him.

That Way of love led Him to Gethsemane, where the conflict between His personal desires and the sins of the world was fought. Human weakness cried out in the Son of God when the cross loomed before Him, and He longed to escape its death. But the Master prayed the prayer that every Christian must learn through experience, Father, if You are willing, take this cup away from Me. But not My will but Yours be done!” [7]

That Way took Him along the *via dolorosa*, “the way of pain, which led to Golgotha. And when He had suffered for the sins of every soul who will accept Him, He died. But this was not the end of the trail, for the Messiah came forth from the tomb as Redeemer and High Priest. “Since then we have in Jesus, the Son of God a great High Priest who has gone up into heaven, let us keep firm hold of our religion.” [8]

Before us lies the Way of the cross. Paul found the Way while he was swaggering along the road to Damascus. Luther, Calvin, Huss, the Wesley brothers, Moody, James White, Uriah Smith, and a multitude which no man can number have followed the Pioneer.

It is for every soul to choose his course through this world. He may take a way that seems good in his own eyes, or he may heed the voice of Jesus Christ saying, “Follow Me.”

Two ways for man are plainly marked in the Bible; paths which lead to opposite destinies. With our power of choice we decide the course we shall follow. The Pioneer of Life calls us toward home; but sometimes, in our willfulness, we look upon the other road and call it good. Look well to the end of the road.

Have you and I the faith to accept the word of Jesus Christ and follow Him? The Way has its costs, for it may lead us through our Gethsemane. Honesty, courage, and decision are necessary if we will follow truth. Like our Leader we must go all the way. Of Jesus Christ it has been said: “What we half believe and what we half do, He did utterly.” There is no halfway point toward heaven. When we start we must arrive at our destination, for we have gained nothing by making a halfhearted attempt. We must go all the way if we go one step.

Horace Bushnell drifted away from the Way in his youth. He took his own selfish course until he doubted if God existed. One day a minister urged him to give his heart to God. Horace Bushnell refused to pray because he had no faith in a divine power. At last he agreed he would go to his room and begin a prayer, “Oh God, if there is a God.” Bushnell appeared later at the minister's church and testified before the

Life Begins With God

congregation of the power of God to change the course of his life. When he started back on the road called "straight," he was met all the way by his Father.

Not only did God make a Way for a prodigal world; but He gave man knowledge to save him from groping blindly in a confused and ignorant philosophy. God gave man truth. The Roman ruler scoffed at Jesus Christ by sneering, "What is truth?" He was no doubt wise in pagan knowledge; so wise, in fact, that he doubted if truth existed. But Pilate, by his sophistry, lost the opportunity of knowing truth, and turned his back upon it.

Truth is more than mere knowledge; it deals not with amassed facts, but with the meaning of facts. Satan promised Eve as she stood by the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden that she would know more by disobeying. He hissed, "You would not die at all; for God knows that the very day you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like gods who know good from evil." [9] Certain it is that man learned more after he yielded to Satan—he found out what was false and evil.

When man left truth, his mind became so corrupt that God was ready to begin a new creation. "When the Lord saw that the wickedness of man on the earth was great, and that the whole bent of his thinking was never anything but evil, the Lord regretted that He had ever made man on the earth, and He was grieved to the heart." [10] The mind of man shifted from truth to error. When thoughts were evil, the actions became sinful.

A new philosophy of life had to come to humanity by the Teacher sent from God. He must not only be the Pioneer of Life, but He must be a trail blazer of the thought of God. Superstition and doubt, pagan rites and taboos, had chained men to a slavery of mind more fearful than slavery of body. The Christ broke the barriers of ignorance to give man truth. He promised, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." Horizons were widened when truth came into the heart; doubts fled away and man stood again as a son of God.

The Jews had heaped taboos upon the Sabbath until a sincere religious worshiper could scarcely serve God or his fellow men on that day. When Jesus came, He tore aside the superstitions and said, "The Sabbath was made for man." Is it allowable to do people good on the Sabbath, or to do them harm? To save life or kill?" [11] Thus the Word became flesh and lived among men. Instead of musty man-made creeds, the Master came living the truth. He likened His followers to the salt of the earth, the light set on a hill, and the branches of a grapevine. The poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, and the pure in heart are blessed in the kingdom of God, Jesus declared. Stale thoughts were challenged by this Teacher; minds that had rolled in ruts for generations were jolted from their course. Truly no man ever spoke as He did.

Could any pioneering be more thrilling than breaking the shallow thought and traditions of men groping in sin? The Messiah drove at the roots of evil, the thoughts of the heart. Hatred was the beginning of murder; therefore, a man who hated his brother was breaking the commandment "Thou shall not kill." And the climax of Christian thinking is stated by Paul: "Let your minds dwell on what is true, what is worthy, what is right, what is pure, what is amiable, what is kindly on everything that is excellent or praiseworthy." [12]

The twentieth century's richest heritage did not come from Greece, Rome, Babylon, or Egypt. Babylon shouted, "Look at my gold." Rome boasted, "Watch my conquering legions." Greece cried, "See my art and culture." Egypt added, "Stand in awe of my pyramids." All these nations sank into eternal slumber, and how little they bequeathed of value! But from Palestine came the challenge, "Behold the Man, the Pioneer of Life!" Civilization is measured from before and after His birth. It is as nations have approached the truth He taught that they have risen in justice and righteousness; it is as men have turned from the lighted way that they have wallowed in the mud of intolerance, tyranny, and degeneracy.

The Way and Truth were brought to sinners; but there was a treasure even more precious which Jesus Christ has made possible—it was the gift of life. Richer life in this world was the first result of Christianity. The three and a half years that the Master taught the multitude, healed the sick, raised the dead, and comforted sinners was an object lesson to man of the depths of God's love. Following the Pioneer of Life we catch the vision of service. We are called to live dangerously for God in the twentieth century. Marcus Dodd once said, "I do not envy those who have to fight the battles of Christianity in the twentieth century." But after a moment's thought he added, "Yes, perhaps I do, but it will be a stiff fight."

Robert Louis Stevenson named a road which was built by the natives of Tahiti, "The Road of Loving Service." This is the Way which Jesus Christ asks us to travel. Nothing that lowers our vitality, nothing that narrows life's horizon, nothing that impoverishes the soul can be carried by us if we follow the way of the Master and attain the goal set before us.

Christ's frontiers remain our frontiers today. There are still battles for us to wage against sin; race

Life Begins With God

prejudices have grown fiercer and fear grips the hearts of men. The foe of intemperance must again be conquered. Frontiers challenge youth today if we follow the Pioneer of Life. A dominant purpose fills our lives when we pledge allegiance to our God and swear to follow Him as a knight of old served his lord. The Christian youth hears the voice as did Sir Calahad, and rides forward to victory:

“Then move the trees, the copses nod,
Wings flutter, voices hover clear:
O just and faithful knight of God!
Ride on! the prize is near.

“So pass I hostel, hall, and grange;
By bridge and ford, by park and pale,
All armed I ride, whatever betide,
Until I find the Holy Grail.” [13]

But with all our vision and courage, it is not possible for man to face life until he has made peace with death. The universal enemy of man was conquered by the Son of God, for He said, I Myself am Resurrection and Life.” Jesus Christ went down into the grave; but Satan could not hold the Sinless One in the tomb, and the Savior came forth—the Pioneer of Eternal Life!

Paralyzing fear grips the heart if we think death is the end of all beauty, all character, and all talent. What hope is there in striving in this world if all our love and friendship has its terminus in a hopeless grave? A scholar once said to me, I consider life nothing but a cheap comedy. Here I have lived, contributed years of research, written books; but now I’ll die. My thoughts and works are eternally ended then. Bah! It isn’t worth all my effort.” Certain it is, as W. MacNeile Dixon has said, “If in the denial of any renewal of life beyond the grave we do not virtually deny all life’s present values, I know not where to find a more resolute denial of them.” [14]

The pagan buried his dead with skull and crossbones over the tomb of his loved one to signify final good-by. The Christian looks beyond the sleep of death to the resurrection, for the promise is: “There are many rooms in My Father’s house; if there were not, I would have told you, for I am going away to make ready a place for you. And if I go and make it ready, I will come back and take you with Me, so that you may be where I am.” [15]

Atop the new capitol building of the State of Oregon stands a statue of the pioneer who came west to the Oregon territory. On the pinnacle it stands as a challenge to the Northwest’s youth. They must not forget the trail blazing of their fathers before them. The Pioneer of Life offers the supreme inspiration of love, devotion, and service that youth has ever known. Will we accept God’s gift of a Way, an eternal Truth, and everlasting Life? Our prayer must be:

“We would see Jesus in the morn of youth;
His call today comes clearly, “Follow Me.” Our feet turn to the Way, we serve in truth;
O Pioneer, we give our life to Thee!”

9. THE ROAD BACK

IN THE city of Paris there once lived a sculptor who discovered a model so perfect in all physical proportions that he resolved to immortalize the form in a plaster cast. According to the memoirs of Schunard, the sculptor built a large box in which the model stood while the plaster was poured up to his neck. In half a minute the man was gasping for breath; in a few more seconds he was purple in the face. Seizing his hammer and chisel, the sculptor broke the plaster prison and saved the model’s life.

How the near tragedy had taken place was simple: The plaster had been liquid to receive, but when it was poured in the mold it soon hardened. As the model made attempts to breathe, his chest contracted a little, and the subtle plaster crept inexorably closer. Then the victim tried to expand his chest, but the congealing mass was solid. The more he gasped and the more he struggled, the more certain he was to be crushed in the vise.

Many a man has attempted to stand in his own strength against the plaster of sin which in cunning stealth creeps around him. He is enticed by the flattery of Satan and trapped in the toils of evil. At first, in

Life Begins With God

pride, he says he can easily free himself from temptation; but soon sin hardens upon the life, and he struggles futilely to free himself. Fighting in his own strength, he is crushed morally and spiritually. He is lost. In the moment of greatest crisis there is salvation to be found. "For when we were still helpless, at the decisive moment Christ died for us godless men." [1]

But what is sin and who can define it for us? Some men will say, I know what is right and wrong in my own mind. That is all there is to good or evil." But is it? Solomon once warned against such cocksure reasoning by declaring: "There is a way that seems straight to a man; but the end of it leads to death." [2] When men begin to follow their "natural impulses" and refuse to be checked or disciplined by a code of law, they are anarchists.

The law of God is the mirror which shows where we do not measure up to the divine standard. The apostle James described the method of revealing sin in these words: "For anyone who merely listens to the message without obeying it is like a man who looks in a mirror at the face that nature gave him, and then goes off and immediately forgets what he looked like. But whoever looks at the faultless law that makes men free and keeps looking, so that he does not just listen and forget, but obeys and acts upon it, will be blessed in what he does." [3] An individual may have one of two attitudes toward his defects as revealed by God's law. He can see them and turn aside in an attempt to forget his sins, or he can see his defects and seek the remedy to eradicate the evils in his character.

To deny that sin exists is merely a modern form of paganism. Walt Whitman expressed this opinion in his "Song of Myself."

"I think I could turn and live with the animals, they are so placid and self-contained;
I stand and look at them long and long.
They do not sweat and whine about their condition;
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins;
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God." [4]

This American poet refused to acknowledge that sin existed, and he misunderstood the Christian attitude toward evil. God never asks any man to "whine about his condition." The gospel of Jesus Christ means hope, joy, and peace. The law does not bring salvation or forgiveness; it merely points out the wrong. Paul declares, "All that the law can do is to make man conscious of sin." [5]

After a man has recognized sin in his character, after he has measured his conduct in the mirror of the law, then he must seek conversion. "How can I experience such a moral and spiritual victory in my life? How can I find the road back to my Father's house when I have been a prodigal?" When the desire wells up in our hearts to find God's way, we are assured that the Holy Spirit is speaking to us.

The hideousness of sin does not make itself manifest in a world of darkness. Every man seems right in his own eyes until the searchlight of truth shines upon him. I once tramped through a cornfield with a half dozen young fellows on a moonless night. In the pitch darkness we never realized what our appearance was like until we arrived in the brightly lighted room of a friend. Behold! we were dirty, unkempt, and abashed. Not until the light of God's word enters our hearts do we recognize our need of repentance. David said,

"The exposition of Thy words gives light,
Giving understanding to the open hearted." [6]

When we know that we are lost we begin to search for the road back. Paul struggled along in his own strength, crying out, "What a wretched man I am! Who can save me from this doomed body?" He likened himself to a prisoner who was made to carry the rotting corpse of the man he had murdered with him wherever he journeyed. His cry is the plea of every sin-burdened pilgrim, and the answer destroys all defeat: "Thank God!" said Paul, "it is done through Jesus Christ our Lord!" [7]

Sin made a gulf between heaven and earth which only the cross of Christ could span. Jesus so loved the world that He made the first step toward reconciliation. His sacrifice was made willingly, for the plan of redemption originated in the days of eternity before the world was created. Man must make the next step by accepting the love of God, since "it is through union with Him and through His blood that we have been delivered and our offenses forgiven, in the abundance of His mercy which He has lavished upon us." [8]

Although Christ Jesus made the way back possible, it is difficult for us to accept His way, because

Life Begins With God

we want to recreate our own lives. “When I have stopped making mistakes, I’ll come to Christ,” we argue. But such words are as futile as those of the besmirched two-year-old boy who says, “When I wash myself all clean, I’ll let mother see me.” We are too proud to allow God to clean up our filthy condition. But in His love, the Father does not look upon our sins. Like as the mother who sees in her dirty son a boy who will soon be scrubbed and properly attired for dinner, just so God sees us as we may become if we yield our wills to Him.

Recognition of sin and the pleading of the Holy Spirit demands repentance and confession. “So repent and turn to God,” exhorted Peter in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, “to have your sins wiped out.” [9] Repentance includes the feeling of remorse for wrongdoing which will cause the sinner to stop repeating his mistakes. “For the pain that God approves results in a repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regrets; but the world’s pain results in death.” [10]

Sin may produce two kinds of pain. The sorrow of a sinner who sincerely repents leads him to confess his wrong and seek forgiveness. His pain is turned to peace and joy as he comes to Christ. The agony of a guilty conscience is the world’s pain. It is the suffering of the wrongdoer who hates the consequences of his mistake, but who refuses to give up his evil. Such men know the sting of a guilty conscience which knows no surcease.

Three brothers held up a passenger train in a tunnel in the Siskiyou Mountains of Southern Oregon. Four railroad employees were killed by the robbers before the loot was obtained. The thieves were trailed, captured, and tried for their crime, and the eldest of the trio described the fatal night in these words: “All that night Roy and I waited without sleeping. We could hear the electric bell on the engine ringing. It was ringing all the time. I tell you, if they had rung a bell during my trial I would have jumped up and told all. I couldn’t have stood it. Sometimes I still can hear that bell.”

It is the old story of an outraged conscience haunting the guilty. This is the pain of the world which knows no cure. Millions of inventions are listed in the patent office, but there is none that can clear the troubled conscience. The bell that rang in the murderer’s soul reminds one of the vivid description of a tortured conscience in the mouth of one of Shakespeare’s characters:

“My conscience hath a thousand several tongues, And every tongue brings in a several tale.
And every tale condemns me for a villain.” [11]

The sorrow that works repentance is not the carnal twinge of conscience which suffers for fear of the punishment. Godly sorrow brings confession.

I have done wrong” are four of the hardest words to utter; but no progress can be made on the road back to God until known sins have *been confessed and forsaken. Solomon wrote:

“He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper;
But he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.” [12]

“But how do I know that God will accept me when I ask forgiveness for my sins?” This doubt arises in many a heart. The same God who created the moral law made the plan of salvation, and both are steadfast and sure. The promise is conditional upon the confession of sin. Listen! “If we acknowledge our sins, He is upright and can be depended on to forgive our sins and cleanse us from everything wrong.” [13] Can we do less than claim that guarantee? There are individuals who think it humiliating to confess their mistakes, and we must all admit that it is; but to admit the wrongs in one’s character is to cast out the flaws and build with true values. In the mirror of the law we see the blemishes, we realize we must be reformed, and with the help of God we set about to confess and abolish those evils from our lives. Such a work of character demands nobility and courage; such right about face tactics are required if we will be soldiers of the cross.

When sins have been confessed to the Father in heaven there is often a parallel work of confession to be carried out with our fellow men. [14] There are faults of character which must be corrected both inwardly and outwardly. “True confession is always of a specific character, and acknowledges particular sins.” We may not have been as honest as Christians must be in business, or we may have been careless in telling the truth. It takes courage to rectify such wrongs before our fellow men, but it is what a converted man must do.

The strongest testimony of a Christian is the sincere reformation of the individual’s conduct. Those who accept Christ will lay aside the former habits and acts which are not in harmony with God’s

Life Begins With God

standard. Paul instructed the church of Ephesus concerning the way back to the heavenly Father: “You must adopt a new attitude of mind, and put on the new self which has been created in likeness to God, with all the uprightness and holiness that belong to the truth.” The apostle explained that all falsehood and anger must be removed from the Christian, and “the man who stole must not steal any more.” [15]

Conforming to the instructions of the word of God we will become new creatures through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. The Master explained the miracle of conversion by comparing it to the human birth. “I tell you,” said Jesus to Nicodemus, “no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born over again from above!” [16]

To be separated from sin is one of the true wonders of conversion. The poet David described the removal of our sins from our hearts in this way: “Far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our offenses from us.” [17]

We may bury the past. The hideous skeletons of our sinful lives will not reappear from dingy closets. The peace that passes understanding can fill the heart and mind of the follower of Jesus Christ.

If our faith is weak we may fail to accept the promises of the word. Too many Christians live in spiritual blindness as did an old peasant in Central Europe. The poor man had saved the life of a prince, and as an expression of gratitude the nobleman paid a huge debt which had crushed the spirit of the family for years. The peasant and his wife gratefully accepted the receipt for the debt marked, “Paid in full.” With tears of gratitude the humble folk went about their tasks; but, as the weeks went by, they continued to hoard every coin to pay on the debt. In order to meet the obligation, they refused to spend the money they received from the sale of farm produce. At once the questions are asked, “How much did those peasant folk appreciate the gift of the prince when they refused to believe the receipt? What change was made in their living to show they had accepted the gift?” Many professed Christians refuse in a similar manner to receive the “paid in full” promises of heaven. They say, “Oh yes, my sins are blotted out;” but they continue to pray for forgiveness for the same old wrongs which God yearns to separate from them as far as the east is from the west. To live by faith in the promises of God, to go forth as ambassadors for the King, and to show by our character, our habits, and our loyalty that we have been transformed, this is our privilege when we have accepted Christ Jesus. We have nothing to hide when we have received the gospel, the good news of salvation. I have met young people who were reticent to admit that they were Christians, and when they did say so they were often apologetic. Not so with the life of Paul, the servant of Jesus Christ, for he declared: I am not ashamed of the good news, for it is God’s power for the salvation of everyone who has faith, of the Jew first and then of the Greek.” [18]

When Jesus touched the lives of the men and women of Palestine they went everywhere telling of His power. When Philip had learned of the Master he told his brother Nathaniel about the Messiah. At once Nathaniel was skeptical. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” he asked. And his brother’s answer is our challenge to the world today. Philip did not argue theology or dogma. He quickly said, “Come and see.”

When we accept the love of God we are witnesses of what the divine power has done in us. After the fisherman Peter was converted, he could declare. “We and the Holy Spirit which God has given to those who obey Him are witnesses to these things.” [19] Thus we become witnesses before a world that knows not God. Called before the jury of critics we must be able to state Philip’s invitation, “Come and see.” This is the test of discipleship.

10. THE GOLD STANDARD OF MORALS

I CAN remember when this coin was worth about twenty cents in American money,” Rex Conwell was saying, as he held a French franc in his hand. We were looking over his collection of coins in his library one summer afternoon. “When I was with the American Expeditionary Forces in France, it took about five francs to make an American dollar.”

“How much is the same coin worth today?”

“Oh,” he went on, after furrowing his brow in thought for a moment, “about three cents. The devaluation of the currency and the bewildering shifts in monetary values have made the difference.”

I picked up a book by a prominent educator a few days after my visit with this friend whose hobby was numismatics. I began to read of a “new morality” which the author advocated. He discussed the devaluation of morals and the possibility of setting up a new code of conduct. I thought at once of the devaluation of currency, and I decided that this scholar was in favor of abolishing the moral gold standard.

Experimentation has spread from the laboratory and classroom into every phase of life. “Why

Life Begins With God

must I accept what old folks believe?” asked one skeptical lad. I will live my own life and make the rules as I please.” To this I replied that it might be well to accept some laws that had been discovered by his predecessors. “It seems silly if I do,” he commented after a pause. “Oh, I wouldn’t feel that it was, I assured him. ‘Just suppose you said you wouldn’t accept the law of gravitation without jumping off the top of a twenty-story building to prove it. Would you call that good sense?’”

“I should say I wouldn’t.”

“That is something of a parallel with what youth is attempting to do when they experiment with their morals, their character, and their faith. You may do it once, but the consequences may bring permanent ruin. It is strange how men are not satisfied to accept the code of morals which a hundred generations of Christians have found to be the bulwark of home, nation, and civilization.

It has become fashionable to break laws, according to Dan Cilbert. His views are expressed in these words: “The serious type of immorality which threatens the structure of society today is not that which results from natural weaknesses of the flesh. It is rather the ‘smart,’ ‘sophisticated,’ ‘modern,’ deliberate and intentional type of sinning, which is caused by the warping of the intellect. Educated youth today does not sin because he cannot withstand temptation; he sins because he is taught it is stupid and ‘old-fashioned’ to withstand temptation; because he is taught that it is desirable, ‘progressive,’ and a sign of culture not to resist temptation. For he has been led to make a religion, a ‘new morality,’ of deliberately giving in to temptation of deliberately seeking it when it is not available!” [1]

Certainly this is not the philosophy of the majority of young people; but it is true of those who are making the sensational headlines in wrongdoing. There is an intermediate step, however, that has become very popular. It is the attitude that one can make careless compromises with moral standards without seriously damaging the character. Do we dare to tinker with the ethical code which has been enunciated by God? Are we capable of streamlining the Ten Commandments?

We must recognize that there is a vast difference between changing a fad and overthrowing truth. A style of dress may be outmoded overnight, but we cannot take off and put on a code of morals as we would an overcoat. “To preach morality is easy,” commented Schopenhauer, “to find a foundation for morality is hard.”

Life has been rudely shaken by the strange paradoxes of this age. The world gloried in the brilliancy of the electric light as invented by Thomas Edison, yet men have learned that they must shroud the magic bulb and walk again in darkness as did their forefathers of the Middle Ages if they value their lives in time of war. We have science, but where are the moral precepts to go with it? We have built skyscrapers, bridges, and luxury liners; yet men must grovel in bombproof shelters like prairie dogs in their burrows.

If the conscience of humanity has not kept pace with inventive genius, if the law of God has not been put into action in our lives, how can we be so egotistical as to think that we can create new social and moral codes? We must face the stark truth: We do not need a new decalogue to clarify our relations to God and man; we need a dedication of heart to obey the everlasting commands given by a divine Father.

Do you recall the story of a young Egyptian king, Mycerinus? This monarch was the best of rulers, but an oracle came to him declaring that he had but six years to reign, and in the seventh year he must die. His pagan mind rebelled against this verdict. Had he not lived a virtuous and honorable life? Bitter in heart he resolved to cast aside his kingly duties and go into the forest with friends to spend the last years in revelry and sensuous delight. Matthew Arnold describes his abandonment in these lines:

“Here came the king, holding high feast, at morn
Rose-crowned; and ever, when the sun went down,
A hundred lamps beamed in the tranquil gloom,
From tree to tree all through the twinkling grove,
Revealing all the tumult of the feast
Flushed guests, and golden goblets foamed with wine;
While the deep-burnished foliage overhead
Splintered the silver arrows of the moon.” [2]

Modern paganism has accepted much of the same attitude toward life. The “new morality” calls for a renouncement of all restraints. “Do as you please,” they say; “you have your life to live here and now. Mat care we for the future?”

But such an attitude can only bring chaos. We must maintain a faith in God and in a world to

Life Begins With God

come; we must believe there are divine precepts, that right will finally triumph and wrong will be punished, or we are no better than pagan Mycerinus.

“All I hear at home or church is ‘Don’t do this,’ and ‘You must not do that,’” complained an energetic youth. Is that all there is to Christianity?” It must be emphatically answered that the religion of Jesus Christ is not composed of negatives.

We have no record that He quibbled over the petty traditions of Jewish ritual. He brushed aside human philosophy to find the vital truths of the Ten Commandments. To the listening multitudes on the mountainside Christ gave the challenge: “Do not suppose that I have come to do away with the law or the prophets. I have not come to do away with them but to enforce them. [3]

Jesus Christ based His life upon the gold standard of character. He taught the golden rule. When we study the law of God in relation to the life of the Master, we can see that it is summed up in His declaration: “Therefore, you must always treat other people as you would like to have them treat you, for this sums up the law and the prophets.” [4] Can youth find any code of living with more action and adventure than that which is compassed in this sentence? Do, live, work for others as you would have them do, live, and work for you. This is Christ’s challenge to the “new morality” of our age. Can any man improve upon the divine plan?

If we attempt to devalue moral standards we must leave the golden rule out of the heart. If we disregard the Ten Commandments we are not heeding the teachings of Jesus Christ. Love to God and love to man ignites the flame of service. If love does not motivate our actions, then selfishness does. When men cry out for a new code of morality they are admitting that their greedy, rebellious desires are at enmity against divine precepts. If we are not moved by love, our words are but hollow echoes and our actions but shadow play. Paul was right when he exclaimed, “If I can speak the languages of men and even of angels, but have no love, I am only a noisy gong or a clashing cymbal.” [5]

Do I obey God because I am afraid of the punishment I will receive if I am not saved? If this is my reason for obeying the commands Of God, I have my reward now. Heaven recognizes but one motive of service love. “If you really love Me, you will observe My commands,” proclaimed the Pioneer of Life. [6]

During a college class hour we were discussing how love is the only true basis for obedience to God. “But I’ve never actually been a Christian, then,” said one of my students after the bell signaled the end of the lecture. “My obedience hasn’t been from love. I’ve followed the religion of my parents and friends because it was the easiest thing to do. When I come to analyze it, I believe I’ve done right because it was expected of me by my parents, by the church, or by the school.”

“The church was once a sort of fire escape to me,” was my reply. I didn’t realize it then, but I later found that I was attempting to do what was right because I did not want to face a final punishment. I was obeying from fear.”

But no man can keep God’s precepts through fear or with selfish zeal. The law of Christ is giving; the love of Christ is serving. We must forget ourselves when we take the path of sacrifice with the Nazarene. Love creates love and as we behold Him our hearts are changed. In knowing the “Friend who sticks closer than a brother” we are constrained to love our brother men.

“This generation of ours is attempting to build a civilization without brakes. This sort of thing can only be overcome by the people who live with brakes, who believe in obedience not only to the laws of the state but also to the laws of God. The moral and spiritual light of the world depends on how you and I reflect the light of the world. The world must be illumined the blackout done away with.” [7] These words from a sermon by the rector of a New York church are apropos for our discussion of the devaluation of moral standards.

Lawbreaking is the result of self-love. When a man’s desires are more important to him than human or divine laws, he becomes dangerous to society. If self-gratification dominates society, then we may look for a complete spiritual blackout. Selfishness wreaks havoc on the life of the sinner, and it reacts upon those whom the sinner influences.

“Three men went out one summer night, No care had they or aim,
And dined and drank here we go home, They said, ‘let’s have a game.
“Three girls began, that summer night, A life of endless shame,
And went through drink, disease, and death, Swift as the racing flame.
“Lawless, homeless, and foul they died. Rich, loved, and praised those men,
But when they all shall meet with God, And justice speaks-what then?” [8]

Life Begins With God

If youth could realize that many of the insidious temptations thrust upon them are created by the greedy, unscrupulous desires of fellow men, they might not be so easily ensnared into sin. The liquor taverns, the beer parlors, the dance halls, the dens of vice, and the gambling resorts are the fruits of selfishness. If men loved their neighbors they would not promote iniquity. The bright lights and soft music are used not because proprietors love youth, but because they are greedy for gold.

The road of intemperance, immorality, crime, and degeneration is built on selfishness. The path of temperance, moral stability, good citizenship, and spiritual advancement is created by love. If we choose the way of Christ there will of necessity be sacrifices, for self cannot rule. But at the end of the road there is eternal life, and along the high road there is love for God and man.

It is the height of selfish indulgence to expect to live without law. Liberty does not mean that we can drive through the stop signals of life. With our liberty we recognize an allegiance to just laws. You may concoct as many clever arguments as you can, but you cannot abolish the divine code of right and wrong.

How shall I test my desires and my actions? Can I know when I am doing right and when I am choosing wrong? God has left His sincere followers a perfect pattern in the example of Jesus Christ. We may ask, "What would Jesus do in this situation?" If we are tempted to cheat in examinations, if we have toyed with a plan to manipulate a shady business deal, we can test our character by the gold standard of the Master. As we study His life we can see how He reacted to the principles and institutions of His day.

Dr. Joseph Sizoo relates the story of a burglar who entered a luxurious home and stole some valuable jewels. There seemed to be no clew to the robber's identity. Finally, the police found a fingerprint of the culprit on the alabaster bust of Hoffmann's Christ. Confessions later revealed that as the burglar had entered the house through a window, his gaze fell on the figure of Jesus. Before he took anything he turned the face of the statue to the wall. Then he stole the jewels. But he left a fingerprint on the bust, and in that act he was detected. How symbolic of life! Our actions are justified or condemned by the life of the Savior. By looking to Him we may know the truth, and through His life and death we may be forgiven of sin, and justified.

An impetuous young ruler came running to Jesus Christ as He traveled in Judea. He was anxious to ask the Teacher a question. Now as the man knelt before Him, the Master was deeply touched, for Mark states that "Jesus looked at him and loved him."

This Jewish ruler believed that he was right in the sight of God. He was prosperous, and to the Jews wealth was a sign of divine favor. He desired to check his religion with the teachings of the Christ, however, and so he asked, "Master, what good deed must I do to obtain eternal life?"

In direct reply Jesus said, "If you want to enter that life, keep the commandments." The gold standard of character was set forth again in the words of the Son of God. "I have obeyed all these commandments. What do I still lack?" came the eager reply and further query.

Through the mind of the young ruler came memories of the long years of training in the law. He thought of his strict observance of every point. But the Master was speaking again. "If you want to be perfect, go! Sell your property and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven. Then come back and be a follower of Mine." [9]

With downcast countenance the rich youth went away, for he could not put his creed into action. Here is the final challenge concerning the law of God. It is insufficient to "keep the commandments." We may not kill, or steal, or commit adultery; but what have we done that demonstrates our love to God and to our neighbor? Notice the words that burned in the sentences of Jesus: "GO, "sell," "give," "come," "be a follower." These exemplify the law in action in the soul.

Selfishness stood between the rich young man and Jesus Christ. He refused to give up his cherished treasures for the love of the Son of God. "His claim that he had kept the law of God was a deception. He showed that riches were his idol. He could not keep the commandments of God while the world was first in his affections. He loved the gifts of God more than he loved the Giver." [10]

The words of G. A. Studdert Kennedy strike into the Christian's heart with this message. "Through the vast complexities of our modern civilized world, the crucified Christ is looking down upon us-with death in His bleeding hands and feet-but life in the light of His burning eyes-and demanding from us all-every individual man and woman-a choice between the glory of Reason, Patience, and Love, and the glory of Force, and Wrath, and Fear." [11]

Gracious is the invitation of the Son of God, "Come unto Me." But with the invitation is the responsibility, "If you really love Me, you will observe My commands." The choice must be made by every youth: to follow Christ and keep the gold standard of divine precepts, or to follow self and devalue the

Life Begins With God

moral code. We cannot serve two masters. Nothing short of the complete heart is acceptable to God.

11. LOOK HOMEWARD, CHRISTIAN

BREATH-TAKING moments of suspense, quick action, thrilling adventure-where is the youth who does not love this? A typical American will shout until he is hoarse when his favorite baseball player knocks a home run over the left field fence. Nothing will make Miss America happier than the excitement of a party in her honor. Eighty thousand spectators will stand and cheer when their hero makes a forward pass or an end run.

If the younger generation thrills to the passing moment, how should they react to the grandest spectacle humanity shall ever witness? Men have been dreaming of this event, and have longed to witness its fulfillment. Youth of the present age have the greatest assurance of being present at the climax of world history, the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Have you allowed your imagination to dwell upon the authentic descriptions of the return of the Master as recorded in the New Testament? You will find some of the most thrilling scenes that have ever been depicted. Read the words of John: "He is coming on the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even the men who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth will lament over Him. So it is to be." [1]

Grasp the picture Jesus created for His disciples as they sat upon the mount overlooking Jerusalem: "For just as the lightning starts in the east and flashes to the west, so the coming of the Son of man will be. Then the sign of the Son of man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will lament when they see the Son of man coming on the clouds of the sky, in all His power and splendor." [2]

All nations of the earth will stand in awe of the returning Son of God, for every eye shall see Him. There is no event in the history of the human race that should captivate the minds of men as that of the second advent of Jesus. The New Testament mentions the return 28 times in its 260 chapters. Bible students declare that this supreme hope is the theme of one verse in every twenty five from Matthew to Revelation.

But when we survey the belief of the majority of modern Christians we find that they have failed to take the Galilean at His word; they have refused to accept His promise, "I will come again." Recently a symposium of nine men and women of international fame appeared in a well-known magazine on the topic: "If Christ Should Come Again!" These novelists, scientists, clergymen, and historians attempted to imagine what Jesus would do if He returned to earth today. They presented Him as a reformer, a teacher, a radical, a leader of men, and one said irreverently that Jesus would be a nuisance if He should come again. But not one of these astute thinkers made any pretense of actually believing the Lord would return!

No Christian can deny the promises of the second advent if he accepts the Bible and the teachings of the Master. Either the Son of God will come or He is an impostor. If we cannot accept this pledge given in His own words, how can we accept His other precepts?

What are the simple, direct evidences to be found in the word of God substantiating the hope of the second advent? The Savior said to the disciples, "There are many rooms in My Father's house; if there were not, I would have told you, for I am going away to make ready a place for you. And if I go and make it ready, I will come back and take you with Me, so that you may be where I am." [3] There is no word in that promise which contains more than two syllables. It is clear enough for any child to understand; yet many wise men lack faith to believe it.

Imagine that you are in a courtroom where the testimony concerning the return of Jesus Christ is being examined. We have heard the words of the defendant declaring, "I will come again." Are there other witnesses whom we can summon to substantiate the divine promise?

Two angelic beings who stood by the lonely disciples as the Master ascended into the heavens are called to the stand. Listen to their words which have been recorded in the book of the Acts of the Apostles: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into the sky? This very Jesus who has been caught up from you into heaven will come in just the way that you have seen Him go up to heaven." [4] Men who doubt the Son of God will also doubt the messengers of heaven. But the word of angels should strengthen the Christian's faith, for they affirm that the same Jesus who lived and taught in Palestine will come again.

But as we are pondering their words we see a short, energetic man approach the witness stand. He turns and faces the audience with a countenance marked by courage, perseverance, and sincerity. He has known what it is to be persecuted, shipwrecked, and imprisoned for the love of his Lord. This veteran is Paul the apostle of Jesus Christ, who was converted on the highway leading to Damascus. He begins to speak:

Life Begins With God

“For we can assure you, on the Lord’s own authority”, he declares in confidence. “For the Lord Himself, at the summons will come down from heaven, and first those who died in union with Christ will rise; then those of us who are still living will be caught up with them on clouds into the air to meet the Lord, and so we shall be with the Lord forever. Therefore, encourage one another with this truth.” [5]

How can we forget the words, “Encourage one another with this truth”? Our faith is strong as we measure this man’s confidence. He is willing to die for what he believes is eternal truth. He knows that Jesus Christ is coming again.

An aged warrior for Christianity stands to give his testimony. He is a Galilean fisherman who was once saved from drowning by his Lord. He arose to the defense of the Messiah and attempted to save Him from the betrayer’s mob. Yes, it is Simon Peter. He is a colorful witness as he declares: “They were no fictitious stories that we followed when we informed you of the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and of His coming, but we had been eyewitnesses of His majesty.” [6] He pauses for a moment as memories rush through his mind. Peter well remembers the transfiguration scene, the feeding of the five thousand hungry people, the resurrection morning, and the day that his Lord ascended into the clouds. Again he speaks:

“First of all, you must understand this, that in the last days mockers will come with their mockeries, going where their passions lead and saying, Where is His promised coming?” [7] Can we not recall some of the ridicule we have heard from our contemporaries? Have not scoffers laughed at the “queer idea” that Jesus Christ will come again?

Peter continues emphatically, “The day of the Lord will come like a thief; on it the heavens will pass away with a roar, the heavenly bodies will burn up and be destroyed, and the earth and all its works will melt away.” [8]

This is a dramatic description of the holocaust that shall envelop the world when the Son of God comes! As we contemplate Peter’s words, a final witness comes forward. He is the apostle John. We hear him repeat the words, “He is coming on the clouds, and every eye will see Him.” Then he raises his voice as he speaks his last recorded words: “He who testifies to all this says, ‘It is true! I am coming very soon!’ Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!” [9]

If you could tune in on the direct words of Jesus Christ and hear His promises, would you believe? Could you deny the authentic statements of the men who were inspired by the Spirit of God? We would certainly accept the spoken message; and if we would take their oral testimony, how can we deny the truth in the Bible? The question stands: Will we choose to believe the promises of God or will we accept the skepticism and false teachings of sinners?

Youth has never been bequeathed as many mistakes by the older generation as have been handed down to the sons and daughters of today. One World War did not wreak enough havoc for the century; it was not enough to kill and wound thirty-seven million men in four bloody years. No, we have felt the deadly scourge again; this time in ghastly total war of lightning rapidity.

Young men and young women were cheated of life a quarter of a century ago by the carnage of Flanders Field. What can be said of the hopes of the present generation? There is little consolation in looking toward the world of tomorrow, for each war has grown more suicidal as science has invented new lethal weapons. Our education and culture have failed to guarantee happiness.

If we are realists we must admit that it is necessary for a divine power to intervene to save mankind from destruction at its own hands for we have seen that science can never counteract human depravity and bestiality. In the last quarter of a century man’s inventive genius has proved to be a Frankenstein to destroy its creators. Unless there is a new birth of spiritual and moral power in the lives of men, civilization is doomed.

Love and pity must have mingled in the heart of Jesus Christ as He saw the closing chaotic episodes in this sin cursed earth. “You will hear of wars and rumors of war; do not let yourselves be alarmed,” admonished the Son of God. “They have to come, but that is not the end. For nation will rise in arms against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes here and there. All this is only the beginning of the sufferings.” [10]

War is the prelude to the last act, for the marching armies are trailed by famine, economic collapse, revolution, and pestilence. A blackout of moral, spiritual, and material values is the denouement of any plot concocted by the god Mars.

For a dozen years we have heard of “the lost generation,” the rising millions of men and women in their late teens and early twenties who have no permanent employment. They wanted a place in the business world; they desired love, marriage, and a home; but they have had no promise of security. I have talked with scores of hitchhikers who have thumbed their way from the Atlantic to the Pacific Coast

Life Begins With God

looking for work. "What's the use to look any more?" many have queried.

The natural resources of Mother Earth have been squandered by selfish men who have thought only of their personal gain in the present moment. The soil grows sterile from excessive cultivation; our natural resources of timber have been squandered by reckless logging or by fire; and it is estimated that our oil supply will dwindle dangerously within the next twenty years. Is this a bright prospect of natural resources for the men and women of tomorrow to inherit?

Concerning the destruction of our resources Henry A. Wallace has said: "Thoughtlessly we have destroyed or wounded a considerable part of our common wealth in this country. We have ripped open and to some extent devitalized more than half of all the land in the United States. Entire species of valuable wild life forms have passed out of existence or have been greatly diminished. We have reduced to a crucial point our oil and mineral reserves." [11]

We can agree with the descriptive language of the ancient seer of Israel who said, "The earth shall wear out like a garment, while its inhabitants shall likewise die." [12] The Utopia which Thomas More dreamed about in the sixteenth century has never been achieved. Upon all the efforts of men to create a perfect world we must write "Failure."

"Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre." [13]

On the road of life there is no "Dead End" for youth who look for the return of Jesus Christ. This Man shall be our hope. Above the impasse of modern civilization where a thousand voices whisper doubts, there sound the unfailing words, I will come again."

Have you seen a freshman at college with a virulent attack of homesickness? Perhaps it is the first time the girl has been away from home and all she can think about is getting back to mother once more. Or it may be the young man who is determined to take the next train that will carry him back to the farm. When a person is genuinely homesick there isn't much you can do to detract his mind from the problem of returning to that home.

How well I remember the first time I went off to a boarding school at the age of fourteen. I was a thousand miles from home, and the first letter I wrote my parents began with these words: "In just thirty-five weeks I can come home." Every week I put that sentence at the beginning of my letter, and every time I lessened the number by one.

When we become homesick for the place that Jesus Christ is preparing, we shall have His return uppermost in our minds. The petty problems, the puzzling trifles of our daily existence will fade into insignificance.

Look homeward, Christian, and a new ambition will drive your life forward in service for your fellow men. The knowledge of a returning Savior has changed the career of many a man or woman who had previously set his goal for this world only. One of the deepest bits of philosophy any youth can learn is the difference between making a living for a day and building a life for eternity.

Look homeward, Christian, and the character is built upon principles that shall endure. There is no shoddy morality in the man who is expecting Jesus Christ to come. "Everyone who possesses this hope in him tries to make himself as pure as He is." [14]

Look homeward, Christian, and the Bible becomes a book for daily study. The Master warned His disciples of unprepared nature by saying, "So you must be on the watch, for you do not know on what day your Master is coming." [15] God's word marks the events that shall close the history of humanity.

Look homeward, Christian, and the fervent prayer of the heart will be, "Thy kingdom come." But with our prayers we will link our lives in the proclamation of the message of salvation. We can assist in answering the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray as we give His gospel to a world that stands in darkness groping for light and security.

Look homeward, Christian, and patience will dominate our lives. The power to endure suffering and disappointment must be an attribute of the child of God who awaits the Master's appearing. No man is waiting for any event until he has every necessary act of preparation completed. If I am leaving on a train, I am not waiting for it until my ticket is purchased, my luggage is checked, and I have nothing to do but climb aboard the cars. When we are in complete readiness for the return of Jesus Christ our patience will be tested. Even as Noah waited for seven days for God to fulfill His word, so the Christian must learn to endure with fortitude, knowing that the promise is sure.

Whenever I hear a pipe organ or symphony orchestra play the largo movement from Dvorak's

Life Begins With God

“Symphony No. 5 in E Minor,” I think of the words that have been composed for the pensive melody, for the strains blend with the theme of “Going Home.” The melody has always brought a note of longing in my heart. In like manner the theme of the New Testament should echo in our hearts and we should respond with words like those of John, “Come, Lord Jesus!”

12. THE TEST OF ALLEGIANCE

ACCORDING to the notice posted on the bulletin board, I was scheduled to take an important examination on May 1 at nine o'clock in the morning. It was a six hour ordeal of the graduate school, and I dreaded it; but a more serious problem confronted me as I checked the day on which the examination would be given. It was Sabbath morning.

There was only one thing I could do, and I did it. The office of the professor who administered the examination was up one flight of stairs in the university building, and with nervous steps I headed for the necessary interview. As I opened the door I tried to imagine what his reaction would be to my request.

Seated at his desk, the youthful English professor, who, as I knew, had been teaching about the same length of time that I had, listened to my predicament. He was interested in my problem from an impersonal, scientific point of view.

“Why do you observe any rest day, anyway?” he asked me with a cynical note in his voice.

“To state it plainly, professor, it is a part of my allegiance to God.”

“But where is there any proof in all the natural order of things for keeping a day of rest?”

“There isn't any,” I frankly admitted. “The observance of the Sabbath must be based entirely upon a living faith in the word of God.”

“That's a strange thing to admit,” the pedagogue returned. “You actually have faith?”

“One must have faith to keep the Sabbath. There is no phenomenon in nature to mark one day in seven as a time of rest. The day is divided by light and darkness; there is a basis for the month in the phases of the moon, and the year is measured by the length of time required for the earth to make a complete rotation around the sun. But there is nothing in the calendar of nature to measure a week of seven days or to show which day is the Sabbath.”

“Then why don't you go to church on the day accepted by the majority of Christians instead of on Saturday?” he probed.

“There is no point in keeping any day holy unless it is the day appointed by God,” I replied.

“Well, this is very interesting, and I want to know more about your ideas on this subject,” the professor was saying. “But first, if it will ease your mind, let me say that you can arrange to take the examination on another day without any inconvenience.”

Taking a deep breath of relief I banished my problem and told my questioner why modern Christians who are consistent with the teaching of the Bible must observe the seventh-day Sabbath. I am convinced that it is of vital importance for Christian youth to show their allegiance to God by Sabbath observance.

Loyalty to a nation's ideals is expressed by obedience to its laws and by positive action which we call good citizenship. Allegiance to God is tested by our fidelity to His precepts and by our devotion to His will for us. Jesus said plainly, “If you really love Me, you will observe My commands.” [1]

Our government levies taxes for its support on the earnings of its citizens; our Creator asks us for a seventh of the time that He has given to us. Six days of the week we may devote to our own interests; but the seventh day belongs to God, it is a day to worship Him.

The fourth commandment of the Decalogue specified that we are to remember the Sabbath, “for in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, and the sea, together with all that is in them, but rested on the seventh day; that is how the Lord came to bless the seventh day and to hallow it.” [2]

Originating in the dawn of the world, the Sabbath comes to man from the Creator as a precious gift. Six days were consumed in creating the earth and the life that is upon it, and on the seventh day God rested. However, this was only the first step in making the memorial of creation. “God brought His work to an end,” and then He “blessed the seventh day, and consecrated it, because on it He had desisted from all His work.” [3] As long as the world stands, the Sabbath remains to commemorate its birth.

No other day has the blessing or sanction of the word of God. The Sabbath has continued unchanged through the passing millenniums. Astronomers affirm that not one second of time has been lost; thus, we can be assured that the seventh day comes to us unchanged from creation, the same day Jesus

Life Begins With God

observed when He lived among men.

Is it necessary for me to keep the Sabbath? asked Fred, a junior in high school. "I've thought of it as a day for older people. We young folks don't need to rest!"

"But, Fred," I remonstrated, "the Sabbath isn't merely a time to catch up with one's sleep, or to rest physically so you can work all the harder for yourself on the other six days. The seventh day is to be a blessing as time dedicated to active, loving service honoring our Creator."

Too many of us are like Fred. We have looked upon the Sabbath from a negative rather than a positive point of view. But our relationship to this holy day is very important, for our allegiance to God centers in the proper observance of God's memorial. If we are sincere Christian youth we must believe in the inspiration of the Bible. We cannot deny the Genesis account of creation. The Sabbath celebrates that event. If we accept Jesus Christ as the divine Son of God we will follow His commands. He said, "The Sabbath was made for man," and He was a living example of how the seventh day can be made a blessing to others. He went about doing good on the Sabbath by comforting the oppressed and healing the sick. The Master summarized His true appreciation of the holy day in these words, "Therefore, it is right to do people good on the Sabbath." [4]

The law of God has never been abolished, and the Sabbath, a memorial of creation, has never been shifted from the seventh day to the first day of the week. Though we may study the New Testament with all diligence, we cannot find a single text which calls the first day of the week a holy day, and we can find no command for its observance nor any blessing pronounced upon it.

The disciples of Jesus Christ were careful in Sabbath keeping. They even postponed the final burial rites for their Lord after they had laid Him in the tomb, because the Sabbath was approaching and they did not want to desecrate the holy hours. Men they went to the tomb on Sunday morning, Jesus had arisen. Even as our Creator rested on the first Sabbath after making the world, so our Redeemer rested in Joseph's tomb when the redemption of man had been accomplished.

The change from the seventh to the first day of the week came about several centuries after Christ ascended into heaven. Church historians record how the shift was made by human decrees. The pagan day of the sun was gradually assimilated into the Christian religion until Sunday became the day of worship for the majority of church members. Leaders in the church declared that the new day of rest was observed in honor of the resurrection of the Lord; but God's word sanctions no such alteration. The seventh day is plainly called the "Sabbath of the Lord thy God," and it is not for weak, sinful man to disregard the divine monument.

In the prophecies of the book of Daniel the human power is revealed that in later times made the attempt to cast aside the divine command. The prophet wrote through inspiration these significant words:

"He shall speak words against the Most High,
And shall wear out the saints of the Most High;
He shall plan to change the sacred seasons and the law." [5]

The history of the church through the ages substantiates this prediction, and the ecclesiastical power admits that it has endeavored to make such a change of the Sabbath without the authority of the Scriptures.

With our minds enlightened concerning the conflict between truth and error, we may be on guard against paying homage to man rather than God. Placing our trust in the teachings of the Bible, we may make our decision as did the apostles, declaring, "We must obey God rather than men." [6]

Youth is invited to follow many human leaders. Waving banners of all colors are beckoning young men and women to pledge allegiance to the cause they represent. God calls Christian youth to follow the banner of Prince Emmanuel. The sign of allegiance is the Sabbath, for we read: "I gave them also My Sabbaths, as a sign between Me and them, that they might know that it was I the Lord that set them apart for Myself." [7]

The seventh-day Sabbath calls us to our Creator and Redeemer, it demands a preparation of heart and life to receive the blessing of the holy day. Solomon gave wise instruction in the last chapter of Ecclesiastes:

"Remember your Creator in the days of your vigor,
Before the evil days come,
And the years approach of which you will say, I have no pleasure in them." [8]

Life Begins With God

Certainly this is a call for youth to remember God in the adventure of life, to show our loyalty to Him by honoring the memorial of creation.

There is buried treasure in the Sabbath waiting to be discovered by those who follow in the footsteps of their Master. This day is not to be a dismal, unhappy time when we hear the groans, "I dread to have Sabbath come," and "We can't do anything we enjoy." Too often the delight of the Sabbath has been crushed by a series of taboos. It is time for youth to search for ways to make the day of worship a period of happiness.

"I never knew what it was to enjoy the Sabbath until I started doing something for others, said the smiling girl as she returned from visiting children in the hospital. "We go every week now, and you should see how the little patients await our visits. We tell them Bible stories, sing them songs, and show them picture books. I would not miss these Sabbath afternoons for anything!"

All of this came from a girl who had found nothing in the Sabbath only six months ago. She had complained because she couldn't play the radio on Sabbath afternoon. She had been bored with the other activities of the home; but when she discovered the thrill of loving service, the Sabbath became a delight.

"When I went out into nature on the Sabbath I found beauty in the woods, the flowers, and the rivers that I had never seen before," a high-school student told me. I learned to study the birds, the rocks, and the trees; I began to look for wild animals. After I started these Sabbath afternoon walks, I could scarcely wait for the week to pass until I could go again. God seemed to be very close to me when I began looking at His handiwork."

This young man had told me how he spent his Sabbath afternoons before he made this discovery. With several chums he would drive around the town in the family car. "We never did anything bad, but we didn't do anything worth while either. The subjects we talked about were not particularly uplifting. I guess we just wasted our time while we waited for the sun to set."

The cobwebs which have filled the mind during the week of busy activities may be brushed aside when the Sabbath comes. Then we may find time for meditation, for relaxation from the tension of work or study. Nathaniel Hawthorne looked upon the day of rest in this way: "Doubts may flit around me, or seem to close their evil wings, and settle down. But, so long as I imagine that the earth is hallowed, and the light of heaven retains its sanctity, on the Sabbath-while that blessed sunshine lives within me-never can my soul have lost the instinct of its faith. If it has gone astray, it will return again." [9]

We require a Sabbath for physical, mental, and spiritual restoration. If we find God's blessing in the seventh day we shall find strength to meet the struggles of the week. The Sabbath is necessary to make a complete man. The Father was thinking of our greatest good when He gave us this holy day. He does not say, "Come apart and rest," but He invites us, "Come apart with Me and rest." This is the time when our thoughts may be molded by the mind of the Master. On this day there is opportunity for the soul to grow. Too long we have waited on the barren plains of materialism and sordid selfishness; the Father calls us to the green pastures of spiritual blessing.

If we cannot find delight in the Sabbath in this life, we would never enjoy the new earth, for in that perfect home "from new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before Me, says the Lord." [10]

Youth must possess the blessing of the Sabbath to maintain a life with God in this tumultuous age. In contrast to the greed and the restlessness, the clutching after those things that crumble in the hands, there is certainty and hope in God's love. Our wars and desolation, our disillusionments and cynicism, have overwhelmed men without God. The seventh-day Sabbath restores our faith, revives our courage, and keeps before us the everlasting memorial of creation and of that future day when our Redeemer shall make all things new.

Our allegiance is tested in our attitude toward God's monument of creation. "There is no religion without worship," says one, "and there is no worship without the Sabbath." The magnet that draws us to the Father is His eternal love, and that love is manifest to teach each individual. Can we not rejoice in heaven's greatest gift on the day which God has blessed?

"This is the day that the Lord has made; Let us rejoice and be glad therein!" [11]

If a millionaire gave you a magnificent estate and told you that every luxury it possessed was your own, what would you do? How would you feel to know that the gardens, the swimming pool, the tennis courts, the spacious house, and all of its furnishings would be your heritage? Only one stipulation would be made by the giver. He would say, "I have built and furnished this estate for you, I place it all in your hands

Life Begins With God

to keep and use as you desire. I make only one request: Will you welcome me one day a week as your guest, and give me that much of your time?"

Could we be so ungrateful that we would refuse the gift and the love bestowed upon us? This is what the heavenly Father has offered us. He gives us life and all our possessions. With these benefits He makes a request, He asks for one seventh of our time. Shall we refuse God's love? Shall we selfishly preoccupy the sacred time that we might spend in communion with our Lord? May we acknowledge the divine claims, and with joy and reverence make the Sabbath the richest experience of life.

13. "A THING OF BEAUTY"

DURING a winter storm on the coast of Oregon a group of guests sat in a beach hotel before the crackling log fire in the huge fireplace. Sheets of rain beat against the windows, and the roar of the gale rose to a crescendo that would sometimes drown the conversation. For twenty-four hours preceding the storm the Pacific had been blanketed by a heavy fog, and in the treacherous sea a great ocean liner had gone aground on a sandspit as it was attempting to enter the mouth of the Columbia River. Shortly after the vessel had stranded, the storm broke in its fury. Since noon a hundred passengers and crew members had waited on board the ship for help from the shore.

As night brought darkness with increasing fury of the storm, the guests in the hotel were talking of the heroic efforts being made to save the men and women on the wrecked liner. During a pause in the conversation a woman quietly said, "I've been praying very earnestly for their safety since the news of the accident reached us."

"What good will that do them?" came the gruff retort of a man as he pointed toward the window facing the roaring combers. "I'll back lifeboats and breeches buoys, well manned, in such an emergency against all the praying we could do."

"Perhaps a combination of prayer and physical effort would be the best," replied the quiet voice. "Man knows about breeches buoys and lifeboats, but he has never fully tested the power of prayer."

The shipwrecked voyagers were rescued by the coast guard, but the part that prayer had in their salvation will not be known in this world. If we could see how the golden threads of prayer are interwoven with our lives and the experiences of others, we might realize that "More things are wrought by prayer Than this world dreams of." [1]

Why should men scoff at prayer simply because they cannot fathom its divine power? Radio is a miracle of science which few of us can actually understand, and yet we accept it as an integral part of our everyday living. As we speed along the highway we are able to tune in lectures, news, and entertainment. If men can invent instruments of communication such as the telephone and radio, cannot God talk with His children, and give them the privilege of talking to Him in prayer? Our unbelief is challenged by the poet in these lines:

"If radio's slim fingers
Can pluck a melody
From night, and toss it over
A continent or sea."

"If petals of white notes
Of a violin
Are blown across a mountain
Or a city's din."

"If songs, like crimson roses,
Are culled from the thin blue air
Why should mortals wonder
If God hears prayer?" [2]

There is eternal beauty in the lives of Christians who are bound to the Father above with the invisible ties of prayer. Every human heart calls out to a higher power in the hour of extremity. God planted the cry for help within every living soul. A study of the non-Christian peoples shows that they have offered

Life Begins With God

prayers to their gods for millenniums. The Hottentots of Africa called out to a “great spirit,” the Callas of East Africa made their cries known to the gods to keep them from hunger and famine, and the Aztecs called upon a supreme being even amid cruel sacrifices. Truly men have sought for the Creator, though to them He was the “unknown God.”

Prayer is the golden opportunity given to men to speak with heaven. When we pray we are seeking God’s direction for our lives. “Prayer is to ask not what we wish of God, but what God wishes of us.” However, we often come to the Father stipulating what we want Him to do for us, forgetting what He desires to give us for our growth and development. How many times we have looked upon prayer as a signed blank check which may be filled out for immediate payment. But we cannot choose what we shall receive; it is our privilege to ask for heaven’s blessings to be given as the Father directs.

We cannot develop a strong spiritual life without regular devotions. Amid the stress and anxiety of our civilization we have too often neglected the study of God’s word and private prayer. One of the admissions of students in Christian academies and colleges is that they fail to stop in the busy routine of classes, activities, and entertainment to take deep breaths of spiritual air. Perhaps as we fall on our knees for a moment in the morning and again before we tumble into our bed at night, we repeat set phrases we have known since childhood; but we fail to grasp the deeper meaning of our devotions. Meditating upon the love of God, pouring out the heart’s desires to Him who loved us enough to give His Son to die for us, remembering His words, and listening to His answers to our questionings -these are a part of the prayer life.

There is beauty in an hour of meditation with God when the bickering cares of the world are shut out. We can relax from the anxiety that infests the mind by following the admonition of the Lord, “Be still, and know that I am God.” The great crises of life must be faced alone with our heavenly Friend. Jesus knew what it was to pray and meditate alone, away from His closest disciples.

“His heart craved sympathy, But He was alone.
He was fighting the battle for all the race, And He was alone.
He was pitted against all the powers of hell, And He was alone.
He was lonely -desperately lonely, And He was alone.” [3]

To a certain degree this is the experience of every man as he journeys through life, and in those hours of solitary thought and prayer there is strong development of Christian character.

Our prayers must be filled with thought. There is a vast difference between praying and saying a prayer. Until our minds call out after the Eternal One, until we see the need of the whole world, our prayers will be shallow and self-centered. The narrower the vision the smaller will be our prayers. When we have the unselfish love for others in our hearts we can pray the larger prayer; we will call out to God, “Here I am! Send me,” instead of “Here I am! Give me.” When youth of the twentieth century lift their eyes to the horizon, when they listen to the cry of suffering humanity, they will pray for all men.

The prayer that Jesus offered in the Garden of Gethsemane reveals the submission to the divine plan that must be ours. As the Master thought of the advancing mob, the unjust trials, the taunting and torturing, and the death by crucifixion, His human nature shrank from the ordeal. In His struggle between the flesh and the spirit He prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass by Me.” So often this is our prayer as we face the difficult moments of life, and it is right that we should pray for a way of escape; but we must willingly complete the prayer as Jesus prayed it: “Yet not as I please but as You do!” [4] How strong is our faith? Are we willing to submit our plans to the divine Architect, or do we attempt to snatch the blueprints of our life from Him in headstrong defiance? The lesson of submission is our supreme need in prayer; it is one of the hardest for the child of God to learn.

A modern parable of submission has been related by the Rev. Iddings Bell. A small boy saw an electric train in a department store window about a month before Christmas. He told his mother that he would pray every night to receive that toy as a present. Now his mother was a widow who did sewing to feed the family, and she knew she could never afford to buy the expensive present for her son; but she was afraid he would be disappointed if God did not answer his petitions.

Christmas came and there was no train. That night the mother knelt beside her ten-year old boy as he prayed, and she said, I hope, John, that you are not terribly distressed because God did not answer your request for the train.”

The child looked at his mother in wonder and replied, “why, mother, God answered me all right. He said, No.” [5] If we could learn this vital lesson of submission to the will of the Father, we would be saved many doubts, perplexities, and bitter disappointments.

Life Begins With God

To understand the power of prayer we must learn to pray. Martin Luther said: "No one can believe what power and efficacy there is in prayer, unless he has learned it by experience. It is a great thing when a soul feels a mighty need and betakes itself to prayer."

There is courage for the Christian as he knows that the Son of God is praying for him. When Peter was on the verge of denying his Lord, Jesus said, "O Simon, Simon! Satan has obtained permission to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail." [6] We are encouraged when we know that father and mother are praying for our success; but how much more wonderful it is to know that Jesus Christ is interceding in our behalf. As we think of His earthly ministry we remember His prayer in the garden, beyond Brook Kedron, "Holy Father, keep them by Your power which You gave Me, so that they may be one just as We are." [7] Strength to follow the narrow way comes as we know Jesus is praying for us. "Therefore, He is able to save forever all who come to God through Him, because He lives and intercedes for them forever." [8]

We do not know how to pray as we ought, but we must come boldly to the Father's throne. As William James declared: "The reason why we do pray is simply that we cannot help praying. That is why we breathe. It seems probable that, in spite of all that science can do to the contrary, men will continue to pray to the end of time. For most of us a world with no such inner refuge would be the abyss of horror."

If our prayers have been narrow and shallow, we should seek wisdom from above. "Lord, teach us to pray," will be upon our lips. Real prayer may cost us a great deal, for we must be willing to do anything we ask God to do for us. If we ask for health, we must be willing to observe the laws of health. If we ask for peace, we must be ready to live peaceably with all men. If we ask for an education, we must be anxious to make the most of every opportunity to learn. If we ask for forgiveness, we should be willing to forgive those who wrong us. If we seek God's love, we must be ready to love all our fellow men.

Reverence for God is an integral part of our public as well as our private devotions. In ancient Israel the Lord asked that His people build a sanctuary that He might "dwell among them." [9] God longs to meet with His children today as He did in ages past. Jesus emphasized the sacredness of His Father's house by declaring: "The Scripture says 'My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a robbers' cave.'" [10]

Do we go to the church to meet with God and to acknowledge His presence in the edifice dedicated to His worship? Or do we consider the church as little more than a convenient place to sit and listen to the preacher? "To the humble, believing soul, the house of God on earth is the gate of heaven." [11] There should be beauty in the worship of God in His sanctuary which surpasses all other religious experiences. In the magnificent temple of Israel there was beauty which produced awe and reverence. The sacred altar and the other furnishings were of gold, the incense arose from the burning coals to impress upon the senses that the place was holy, and rich music appealed to the hearts of the worshipers. Frequently the psalmist mentions how men should worship the Lord in "the beauty of holiness."

My thoughts on reverence were challenged not long ago when I read the following statement: "Nothing would be so beneficial as to have our pulpits silenced for a year. The other phases of worship would be restored the worship of prayer, praise, and enlightened faith. Some of them are entirely gone from the churches. The people no longer pray, but listen to the minister as he prays. Worship has become a passive matter. The congregation has become an audience -a body of listeners." [12] It would certainly be wrong to do away with preaching; but at least the statement stimulates thought. Indeed, there are other parts of the service in the church in which every worshiper may reverently take part.

Our hymns and sacred music should be chosen to express the adoration and praise we offer to God. Light songs with no depth of spiritual experience are not the most fitting form of music to offer the King of kings.

The worship of God is to be an active, living experience in every Christian. Passive, listless silence or stagnant, sleepy indifference is not reverent worship of the Lord. Alert, keen minds should concentrate upon prayer and meditation as well as upon the sermon. "The moral taste of the worshipers in God's holy sanctuary must be elevated, refined, sanctified!" [13] Thoughts of business or secular interests should have no place in our minds as we come before the loving Father.

David could write of attending the services in the temple with all the joy and fervor of a devout worshiper. "I was glad when they said to me, Let us go to the house of the Lord." [14] Such an experience as the psalmist found has been discovered by many young Christians in our day. Discussions in the college classrooms have shown me that youth loves the beautiful in nature, in art, and in religion. I have been drawn very close to God in the beautiful vesper service in the church," wrote a freshman girl in her theme. "The deep harmony of the organ, the words of the psalm in all of their sweetness and power, the quiet

Life Begins With God

meditation-all of these made me realize God was very near. How I wish that all our churches had reverence and beauty in the service. I need to find peace in the church that will go with me in my daily humdrum work.”

Reverence begins in the thoughts of the individual, and when our devotion in private has been shallow and superficial, our worship in public may be mere form. The humble follower of Jesus Christ will find many more blessings in the church services if he has known the beauty of constant private prayer and meditation. We must keep the lines of communication clear between God and the soul. If sin blocks the two-way conversation, a defeated life is the result.

During the invasion of France by the Nazi armies the lines of communication of the defenders were broken. When the soldiers could not hear from the staff headquarters, disorganization and retreat were certain to follow. Rumors of defeat spread from post to post, and enemy propaganda did its work. In the Christian's life there is a battle between good and evil, and it is absolutely necessary to keep the line of communication open. If the voice of our Captain is not heard, the temptations and doubts of the enemy assail us on every side. Prayer is the communication line by which God's messages reach the listening ear of the Christian.

There is an escape from the sordid machine age with its raucous din, there is relief from the ugly realism of this crime-, and war-ridden age. It is found in the peace and strength of our devotions. We can tune out the static noises which destroy the music of life, and heed the still, small voice: “Go, My people, enter your chambers, And shut your doors behind you; Hide yourselves for a little while, Till the time of wrath go by.” [15]

Alone with the Master when the fog of doubt thickens about groping humanity, alone with God in the dark watches of the night, talking with our Friend when all men revile and forsake us, listening to His voice when no other message can bring comfort and cheer-this is the enduring religion of the true Christian, the crowning friendship!

14. THE SYMPHONY OF LIFE

THE musicians are seated upon the broad stage and the audience is hushed as the conductor enters from the wing, takes his place, and lifts his baton. The music from a hundred instruments blends in the “Fifth Symphony” by Beethoven. Here is a mighty orchestra in all of its strength, grandeur, and superb musical quality. Every musician plays his part. There are the high delicate notes of the flute and the low full tones of the bass viol, the soft tremolo of the violin, and the weird vibrations of the oboe. The immortal music of the masters is re-created by the great symphony orchestras.

“Symphony” is defined as a harmonious blending, such as the mingling of sounds and colors. Since any harmony may be described as a symphony, it is fitting to consider the symphony of life. In human relationships every man plays his part. The music of his life is not the same as his brother's score, yet he must blend himself with a thousand other people and bring harmony and happiness to the multitude. How monotonous it would be if we were all alike. Our individual differences are of great value for where my brother is strong I may be weak, and he can help me with his peculiar talent. “None of us lives only to himself, and none of us dies only to himself.” [1] The abilities we possess will influence other lives.

Jesus Christ gathered a little symphony about Him and trained them to produce immortal music. He could not mold them into perfect harmony without discipline and practice. There was Simon Peter, the impetuous, intrepid radical who was talking constantly. The rugged fisherman was ready to rush into any crisis and repent afterward. In direct contrast with him was his brother, Andrew, the conservative, reserved disciple. He never spoke an unnecessary word. What a queer combination of brothers were Peter and Andrew, yet in spite of their eccentricities the Master found a place for each in His plan.

James and John were surnamed “sons of thunder,” probably because of their fierce, turbulent natures. They were jealous of the highest position next to the Lord, and they were anxious to call down fire upon their enemies. Yet John became the beloved disciple, faithful in his devotion to his Master through the lonely years of his ministry and exile.

Thomas was the doubter and pessimist. His faith was often a minus quantity; but the Lord was tolerant with his weakness. He loved the doubting one and saw within him talents that would make him an apostle.

As the Master Conductor, Jesus worked long to bring harmony among His followers. Bickering, jealousy, sarcasm, and scorn broke the harmony of the twelve men time and again. Peter attempted to pry

Life Begins With God

into the plans that Jesus had for John, and the Lord saw fit to rebuke the fisherman. Judas betrayed the Messiah and forsook the symphony of the twelve. His life ended in tragedy.

It was not until the Day of Pentecost that complete harmony was found among the disciples. When the power of God was fully manifested in their character “they were all with one accord in one place.” The melody of Christian life had been attained. Now they could go forth and win thousands to the gospel. With that humble group, unlettered and poor, the Man of Galilee brought the news of salvation to the world.

The Christ of today has not stopped using humble human instruments to bring forth sweet melody for a sordid world. John Bunyan, David Livingstone, Florence Nightingale, Dwight Moody, Ellen Harmon, and a myriad other men and Women have played their part at the bidding of the Master, and from their souls came the eternal music of love.

Have you watched a great philharmonic orchestra tune up before the concert? It is essential that every instrument be in tune. There could be no harmony if every musician adjusted his violin, clarinet, trombone, or viola to the pitch he desired. Only discord would result from allowing such individual ideas to run riot. Watch the members of the orchestra as they tune to the oboe. So it is in the symphony of humanity; if we would have harmony we must tune our lives to the Infinite One.

A few years ago a musical organization announced that it would present concerts without a conductor. It was not long until the orchestra had disintegrated and the musicians had abandoned the project. A conductor is essential to blend the music of a hundred instruments. The personality of the director is manifest in the interpretation of the music. So in the life orchestra, it is necessary for us to follow a leader.

Have there been days in your life when the joy of being a Christian could be felt all over? What was the secret of this mountaintop experience? Was it not that your eyes were on the Master Conductor and you knew you were following Him? We were engrossed in the music He had composed; we were obeying the instructions for a Christian by “fixing our eyes upon Jesus, our leader and example in faith.” [2] Certainly this is an essential for melody in life.

Jesus Christ has played every piece that we must play; He knows the difficult passages before we strike them. He has suited our part to our qualifications and needs. The score for our life will never be harder than we can master. If our eyes are upon Him He will inspire us with confidence; His invitation is sure, “Follow Me.”

When our attention is focused upon the great Conductor we shall not be detracted from the part we have in the symphony. One evening at a school program a stringed quartet was playing a march. In the middle of the number the boy who was playing the cello lost his place in the music. He sat for several minutes with a sheepish grin on his face before he found his place again. After the program I heard him say, “I lost my place when I tried to see how the audience liked our number.”

Isn't that a trait that is noticeable in the symphony of humanity? When we are following the score, and the melody rings forth, we sometimes grow confident in our ability, and lose our way. When we allow our gaze to fall upon others in the symphony we forget to watch the Conductor of our life. Soon we are striking discordant notes, we become discouraged, and we say we are determined to quit the orchestra.

Paul learned to concentrate on the one essential. “Forgetting what is behind me,” he said, “and straining toward what lies ahead, I am pressing toward the goal, for the prize to which God through Christ Jesus calls us upward.” [3] This heroic apostle devoted himself unceasingly to the mastery of the art of being a Christian. Musicians give their life for their art; they are willing to make any sacrifice, to go without sufficient food or clothing if they may see the fruit of their toil in the creation of a masterpiece. Are we willing to do as much for God?

It is the love of his art in the heart of the musician that produces immortal music. The soul of the violinist is demanded if he would thrill his audience. Even so in the symphony of human experience, it requires our all to master the melody of life. The world often measures a man by his dollars instead of by his sense; but such a criterion has never measured the immortal music of a Christ like life.

There are the silences in a great symphony which are almost as impressive as the mighty crescendo of the full orchestra. All of the instruments do not play continually. There are times when a section of the orchestra must stop playing while other instruments take the solo part. Have you watched the musicians in such a time? They are not carelessly lounging in their seats, but they are counting the time and watching their music for the moment when they shall play again.

How often we have the silences in the everyday routine of living. We are not all playing solo parts. Sometimes we have but a soft obligato or a muted echo, and again we must be silent. But is this any reason why we should not go on studying the music of our life, and planning for the moment when we shall join in

Life Begins With God

the full orchestra? In those silences there may be a harmony which the strength of the full orchestra could not produce.

Youth has found the past decade a time of discouragement. Many young men and young women have prepared through education for their places on the stage of life. They have stood ready with instrument in hand, awaiting the curtain call, but there seemed to be no part for them to play. But the Master Conductor has not forgotten. Amid the disappointment of such an hour there is the assurance, "Follow Me." We may take courage from such Christian philosophy as this: "The thoughts and ways of God in relation to His creatures are above our finite minds. But we may be assured that His children will be brought to fill the very place for which they are qualified, and will be enabled to accomplish the very work committed to their hands, if they will but submit their will to God, that His beneficent plans may not be frustrated by the perversity of man." [4]

There are the unsung heroes of life who do the common humdrum duties; those who must stand aside because of physical infirmity; or those who must watch others go forward in the place they long to fill. It demands courage, perhaps more courage, to stand aside and wait than it does to fight in the heat of battle.

Susan Mason had planned to go to college every year for three years. Each summer I had visited her in her home and helped her arrange her program of studies. She was determined to be a nurse. But every year she was forced to remain at home because of an invalid mother. The fourth year I visited her she said, "I've almost given up hope of ever seeing my dream come true. I know I'm helping at home; but will God understand? Will He help me some day to make up for what I can't attain now?"

Certainly God does not forget us in the silent watches. John Milton, famous Christian poet, found consolation during years of bitter defeat. He saw the cause of liberty for which he fought go down in ruin. He lost those whom he loved. And then, most tragic stroke, he became blind. As he sat in darkness he dictated these words which have been spoken by thousands when they found themselves in the dark places and felt the surge of despair:

"Thousands at His bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
They also serve who only stand and wait." [5]

There was another John, the forerunner of the Messiah, who came to Israel with a stentorian voice. His message of power caused even the rulers of the Jewish synagogues to quake. John the Baptist cried for his listeners to repent because the kingdom of God was at hand. Then a day came when Jesus Christ walked by the Jordan River. John saw him, and a new note was struck in his message. "Behold the Lamb of God," was the cry of the prophet.

Gradually the music of John's life grew softer and fainter. He was imprisoned, he languished, and then came silence. John had predicted such a course in his life, for he said at the river, "He [Jesus] must grow greater and greater, but I less and less." [6] Need we worry about the silences of our life if Jesus grows greater in our hearts, and self decreases?

The nineteenth century. English author and critic, John Ruskin, saw the spiritual significance of the silences in music when he wrote: "There is no music in a 'rest,' but there is the making of music in it. In our whole life melody the music is broken off here and there by 'rests,' and we foolishly think we have come to the end of the tune. Be it ours to learn the time and not to be dismayed at the rests. They are not to be omitted. If we look up. God Himself will beat time for us. With our eyes on Him we shall strike the next note full and clear." [7]

The world plays the dirge of sorrow today amid war, famine, and disillusionment. Truly it is-

"The still, sad music of humanity." [8]

But what other melodies could come when nation hates nation, when lies are sown upon the winds of despair. Amid the rhapsody of hate-the whine of bombs, the staccato of machine guns, and the shrieks of the wounded and dying-there must still be heard the notes of faith.

In the great city's roar with the elevated cars above, the taxicabs and streetcars producing a cacophony, a man paused one day and said to his companion, "Did you hear the song of that bird?" His friend scoffed at the idea of hearing the melody of the bird above the noise of the street. With closed eyes the men listened, and indeed they could hear the notes of the robin clear and strong amid the tumult.

Life Begins With God

Life's symphony becomes distorted as men fail to watch the Master Conductor. The melody disappears in a jarring jangle of doubt and fear; the parts turn from harmony to discord. But beyond the noise of humanity there is the still, small voice which calls, "Follow Me."

We may play our part feebly as did the little girl who was practicing her piano lesson. In a dull, mechanical way she pounded out the notes until everyone in the boardinghouse was nervous. Quietly a famous pianist entered the room, watched the little maid, and sat down on the piano bench beside her. As she thumped the keys, he began to accompany her with rich chords and arpeggios. Soon the nerves of the listeners were calmed and soothed; the boarders came to the door to see how the perfect harmony was produced. They saw the master beside the little music student.

It is the privilege of every Christian to have the Master at his side. He is able to cover our faltering efforts with the perfect melody of His sinless life. If the music of your life and mine has any attraction for a critical world it is because we have Jesus Christ accompanying us.

The symphony of life is only a great rehearsal for the concert in the new earth. Those who have mastered the music of human experience will join in the rhapsody of "Moses and the Lamb," the song of victory. John heard the heavenly orchestra and chorus as it shall play when the redeemed stand upon Mount Zion. The mighty symphony shall echo through the precincts of glory. I heard a sound from heaven," wrote the disciple of Jesus, "like the sound of great waters, and loud peals of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing on their harps. They were singing a new song before the throne." [8]

But before we can join the symphony and chorus of eternity we must have mastered the practice period of this life. There are hours of drudgery, there are days when it seems we shall never learn our part. We have silences, and we feel like rebelling when another is applauded for the music we longed to play. But above us stands the Master Conductor keeping watch over His own, and He longs to draw the melody from our souls that shall echo through heaven's courts forever. This is the reward of loving service which shall make all the discipline of today seem as nothing when we shall join in the symphony beyond.

15. IT'S DANGEROUS TO THINK

EXCEEDING the power of all battleships, bombing planes, tanks, and high explosives is the dynamic force of human thought. A battleship is torpedoed, bombing planes crash in flames, tanks are trapped and destroyed, explosives are detonated and their destruction is done; but the mind of man continues to create ideas that transform the world. Here is a weapon that has overthrown tyrants, set up new governments, brought about reforms, and subdued the forces of evil. Thought is action in embryo.

The mind is the Creator's marvelous gift to man which lifts him above the brute. "All our dignity consists in thought," said Pascal. We possess the power to weigh issues, to marshal ideas, and to decide upon a course of action. The brain re-creates the impulses that come to it, and new concepts are formed in the mind that may produce a rhapsody, an epic poem, a master painting, a scientific discovery, or a great invention.

Like every other God-given talent, it is possible to use our thoughts for good or for evil. It is dangerous for any man to think unless he lays the foundation of his ideals and thoughts upon moral principles. Without God in the life, the thoughts become selfish, immoral, and degrading. Why? Because the mind has no stabilizing element unless it includes spiritual values. When lawless thoughts control the mind they inevitably lead to lawless actions.

It is dangerous to think if we are victims of "wishful thinking." Those who do not like to face the realities of a humdrum existence sometimes allow their minds to wander in a dream world. They are determined to avoid the problems that require hard work and perseverance. It is possible to become intoxicated in one's thinking even as a drunkard "passes out" under the influence of alcohol. The man who habitually drinks does so to escape the problems he is afraid to confront; he longs to forget. The drug fiend hopes to lose himself in a realm of fantasy, that is why he takes opiates. What the drunkard and dope fiend do in physical dissipation, many a youth parallels with unhealthy mental habits.

Fred is a "wishful thinker." He hates his work as clerk in a grocery store. Of course, he aspires to be the manager of a wholesale grocery company some day, but he is making no constructive preparation for such advancement. In his evenings he surrounds himself with a stack of "thrillers," those sordid pulp magazines, and he soars from the world of toil with his heroes. He yearns to do brave exploits like the adventurers in print, but he refuses to conquer the problem that he faces every morning when he unlocks the store.

Life Begins With God

Or perhaps you have met Janice, another “wishful thinker, who indulges in pernicious mental pastimes. When she finished high school she could not find a position as a stenographer, and so she took a job as maid in a wealthy home. She has several spare hours each day, and what does she do to improve them? She sits in front of the radio listening to the sentimental serial dramas that are broadcast continually. Her knowledge of typing and shorthand is deteriorating, and her mind is becoming a sieve for modern mental chaff.

By living in a perpetual dream world instead of facing facts and mastering difficulties, such individuals attempt to find refuge in a realm where moral laws may be shunted aside. Some day they will awaken to tragic reality, but it may be too late to return to the rugged path of success through hard work and perseverance.

For millions of human beings in many nations of the earth it is extremely dangerous to think, for if the mind challenges the existing order and other people find it out, it may be fatal to the thinker. “Crowd-mindedness” is a perilous mental state for men and women created to think for themselves. Youth are often influenced by popular opinion, and they shift their views as a chameleon changes color to match its environment. Those who live on the opinions of others exist in a turbulent, unstable state of mind. You have heard it said of such people, I wish he had a mind of his own.” Victims of secondhand thinking refuse to exert their own brains, for they have found it comfortable to lean upon the decisions of somebody else.

Modern man needs to accept anew the responsibilities God gave him; he must use the talents that his Creator entrusted to him. Solomon truly exclaimed, “Only see this which I have found, that God made mankind upright, but they have sought out many contrivances!” [1] Schemes and contrivances of unscrupulous men have been laid to make mass thinking so simple that it appears foolish to try to think for one’s self. But the rediscovery of the individual and the revival of independent thinking is necessary for the preservation of human liberties. The neglect of the mental powers weakens the will until men finally have no desire to think or act except at another’s command.

Even in a land of freedom it may be dangerous to think if the mind delves into reckless speculation. I have met victims of skepticism who had reached the point where they could not believe anything. They lacked a foundation for building character largely because they had trained themselves to doubt all things. They were tossed about on a sea of questioning without chart or compass to guide them to a safe haven. It is true that “philosophical speculation and scientific research in which God is not acknowledged are making skeptics of thousands.” [2]

In no age has the pursuit of knowledge been so enthusiastically undertaken as it is today. We know more than we have ever known before; but we are convinced that we know nothing, and the thoughts we have conceived have not made for happiness. Instead, they have brought uncertainty and distrust. Some young people consider it a mark of independence and superiority to be skeptics; they are fascinated by all species of unbelief. All too often this brings ruin to the soul, for there can be no sound reasoning without God in the major premise, and all conclusions reached without Him are false.

Because thoughts in which God is not included bring disillusionment and despair, there are some people who avoid thinking. “I’ll think about it tomorrow,” they say, and then they attempt to push the serious questions out of their minds in a whirl of frivolity and amusement. David pictures those who in selfish obstinacy go their willful way refusing to weigh the serious questions of living.

“The wicked in the pride of his countenance does not seek Him;
All his thought is, There is no God.” [3]

The warnings given by Noah to the antediluvian skeptics must have caused them to think when they first heard his words. But they refused to believe the message for they did not want anything to interfere with their selfish plans. They closed the doors of their mind to thoughts of God, and lulled themselves into forgetfulness by turning to gaiety – “eating, drinking, marrying, and being married up to the very day that Noah got into the ark and the Flood came and destroyed them all.” [4] When the man who heard Noah’s words refused to consider God in his thoughts, he plunged deeper into crime, and “the whole bent of his thinking was never anything but evil.” [5] It is dangerous to attempt to think without God in the heart.

When we accept the call of the Master we offer our lives as a living sacrifice. We dedicate our talents to His service, and we include the capabilities of our mind. Interpreting man’s relationship to God, Jesus said, “You must love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole soul, and your whole mind.” [6] Our thoughts are remolded as our lives are transformed.

Life Begins With God

“But how can I drive evil thoughts out of my mind? They seem to pop up when I least expect them.” This is the puzzling experience of many people who are striving to follow the example of the Nazarene. How can wrong thinking be mastered? Paul, the most profound thinker of the apostles, writes this admonition concerning mental habits: “Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” [7]

The thoughts are purified and elevated as the Spirit of God speaks to the heart. The Christian can conquer evil thinking by following the technique Paul describes. “I destroy arguments and every obstacle that is raised against the knowledge of God, and I take captive every thought and make it obey Christ.” [8] This is the militant man of Tarsus. He had been a fighter against God, but when he was converted he took up his weapons for the battle of the Lord. Any thoughts that were traitors, Paul captured and brought to the allegiance of his Master. There was no “wishful thinking” on the part of this veteran of the cross; he was ready to challenge speculative thought with determined action. He made his thoughts obey.

We can measure our thinking according to the Bible, for it is “keen in judging the thoughts and purposes of the mind.” [9] To counteract all temptation to erroneous thinking, we must follow the example of David.

“I have stored Thy message in my heart, That I may not sin against Thee.” [10]

This is a positive program of mental hygiene built upon a knowledge of God’s word. Purity of life is founded upon right thinking. Our thinking is upon too shallow a plane to fulfill the ideal of heaven. Studying the Scriptures will elevate the mind and expand our thoughts concerning the universe. “Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God’s ideal for His children. Godliness –god likeness- is the goal to be reached.” [11]

Youthful Christians may succumb to some of the contagious ideas that are lurking in modern intellectual circles. One such fallacy centers in the idea that humanity can raise itself by its own intellectual bootstraps. Even in Christian colleges and universities the glorification of knowledge has at times become a fetish. After a diligent student has spent years in research, he sometimes comes to believe that his accumulated knowledge will bring him salvation.

I have known men and women who advanced in their scholarly attainments until they substituted learning for the love of God. It is dangerous to think unless one can maintain his humility in the presence of revealed truth. Neither scholarship nor academic degrees will substitute for the power of God. The sincere Christian who advances in his education will remain humble as did Kepler who studied the wonders of astronomy. He turned from the telescope to exclaim: “Oh, God, I am thinking Thy thoughts after Thee.” All attainments of the mind are as a drop in the bucket when compared with the ocean of knowledge beyond the ken of man. There is no salvation in mental attainments, and the true scholar is the first to humbly recognize this fact.

The Christian develops his body, mind, and soul during his years in school in order to be better prepared to give the gospel of Jesus Christ to mankind. Education which is obtained only for personal gain is detrimental to the individual and to society. As students and teachers, it is our duty to know that mental capabilities alone will not win souls to the kingdom of God.

Paul met logic with logic and argument with argument on Mars’ Hill in ancient Athens. He was preaching in the cultural center of Greek civilization, and the learned men gathered about to hear his reasoning. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. But in all these mental gymnastics there was little of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Soon after this, Paul determined to forget the wisdom of men, for he said to the people of Corinth, “I resolved, while I was with you, to forget everything but Jesus Christ and His crucifixion.” [12] It is dangerous to build upon the learning of men; it is perilous to think unless the mind of the Master is our guide.

Insidious propaganda of all types is choking every channel of communication to our minds. Although knowledge will not bring salvation in itself, yet we need to be able to think for ourselves as never before in world history. Religion is not a new dress that can be fashioned by mother and put on by daughter. Your religious faith is tested in the crucible of thought and experience, and forged upon the anvil of adversity and trial.

It is essential for every Christian youth to know what he believes and why he believes it. John Milton wrote a book explaining his views on all the Christian doctrines. How long would it take you to write out all your convictions concerning the teachings of the Bible? Have you thought for yourself in matters of religion and answered many questions of principles in your own mind? Writing to young Timothy, the apostle Paul said, “I know whom I have trusted.” [13] To know anything we must use our

Life Begins With God

mental powers and possess logical proof and conviction.

A solemn responsibility rests upon thinking men and women who have studied the Scriptures and know in their minds what is truth. If they fail to live up to their knowledge they have failed as disciples of Christ. After we have thought and reasoned for ourselves we must live up to the sincere convictions we possess.

To think for ourselves may bring us to decisions which will test us to such an extent that it may lead us to eventual imprisonment or death. That is the responsibility which every man faces who is able to think and decide in his conscience. With this responsibility there are glorious rewards for right thinking. The mind reaches above the sordid and low toward the thoughts of heaven. The horizons of life enlarge, and human appreciation grows for nature, for humanity, and for God. Our thoughts are noted in the records of heaven, for a book of remembrance is kept “concerning those who revere the Lord and think upon His name.” [14] No more complete program of thinking can be found than is summarized in this sentence from the inspired Scriptures.

Test your thoughts by the high standard and it will never be dangerous for you to think. “Now, brothers, let your minds dwell on what is true, what is worthy, what is right, what is pure, what is amiable, what is kindly on everything that is excellent or praiseworthy.” [15] This is the essence of Christian thinking-it will lead us to the mind of Christ.

16. THE GOLDEN MEAN

FOR MORE than a thousand years the Olympic games were the national institution for every freeborn Greek. The oldest of these athletic contests was organized as a quadrennial event at Olympia in 776 BC, and they were continued until AD 393. Stalwart youth from every city state of Greece gathered to participate in the races, the broad jump, discus throwing, javelin throwing, and wrestling.

Dr. Will Durant describes the national contests of this ancient democracy: “When everything was ready the athletes were led into the stadium; as they entered, a herald announced their names and the cities that had entered them. The most important events were grouped together as the pentathlon, or five contests. To promote all-round development in the athlete each entry in any of these events was required to compete in all of them; to secure the victory it was necessary to win three contests out of the five. When the toils of five days were over the victors received their rewards. Each bound a woolen fillet about his head, and upon this the judges placed a crown of wild olive, while a herald announced the name and city of the winner. This laurel wreath was the only prize given at the Olympic games, and yet it was the most eagerly contested distinction in Greece.” [1]

Every young Greek was ambitious to win that laurel wreath. If successful in the contest he received national honor and the praise of his home town. If he won the prize he might expect songs and poems to be written to commemorate his name.

But the severe discipline required in preparing for the games eliminated many of the contestants. For ten months each youth was forced to submit to severe training rules before he was even allowed to participate in the elimination contests. Concerning the period at the training camp Epictetus wrote:

“You would desire to be victor at the Olympic games, you say. Yes, but weigh the conditions, weigh the consequences; then and then only, lay to your hand -if it be for your profit. You must live by rule, submit to diet, abstain from dainty meats, exercise your body perforce at stated hours, in heat or in cold; drink no cold water, nor, it may be, wine. In a word you must surrender yourself wholly to your trainer, as though to a physician.

“Then in the hour of contest, you will have to delve the ground, it may chance dislocate an arm, sprain an ankle, gulp down abundance of yellow sand, be scourged with the whip-and with all this sometimes lose the victory.” [2]

The apostle Paul, living in the first century, knew well the rigors of the Greek athlete. In his letters he likens the Christian life to the Olympic games, for he penned these words to the men of Corinth: “Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one wins the prize? That is the way you must run, so as to win. Any man who enters an athletic contest goes into strict training, to win a wreath that will soon wither, but the one we compete for will never wither. So that is the way I run, unswervingly.” [3]

In building Christian character “strict training” is absolutely essential. The Authorized Version translates Paul’s admonition in these words: “Every man that strives for the mastery is temperate in all things.” To go forward “unswervingly” in the adventure of life demands temperance in thought and in

Life Begins With God

action. Aristotle, a Greek philosopher, called this attribute the Golden Mean. It may be defined as the ability to stay in the center of the way with the eyes fixed on the goal, without swaying to one extreme or the other.

For every virtue Aristotle believed there were two extremes, an excess and a deficiency. Courage is a trait of character that we admire. A lack of courage leads to the weakness called cowardice; too much courage creates a false bravery which is termed foolhardiness. The Golden Mean is the balance between excess and deficiency.

Even as a Greek athlete could not dissipate one day and live according to strict rules the next, so a Christian cannot swerve back and forth between good and evil. "For the road that leads to destruction is broad and spacious, and there are many who go in by it," declared Jesus. "But the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few that find it." [4]

We cannot wobble from one extreme to another and make advancement in our Christian experience. We can steer right onward through the narrow gate if our eyes are upon Jesus Christ. Modern science has taught us it is possible to keep a giant air liner on its course. The radio beam signals the proper pathway. When the pilot shifts to the right or to the left, his instruments give a warning signal. God has given us an infallible communication system that will keep us from losing the direct course to the kingdom of heaven. The prophet states: "When you turn to right or to left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it!'" [5] If we have studied the word of God, if we have sought for wisdom and instruction by prayer and meditation, we may expect to have the Spirit of God impressing the truth upon our minds. This is the answer to the problem of thinking pure, uplifting thoughts in a time when the sordid and evil are the commonplace.

With the great apostle we can fix our eyes upon the Pioneer of Life and say, "I am pressing toward the goal, for the prize to which God through Christ Jesus calls us upward." [6]

When we study the biographies of some of the men of the Bible who failed in character building, we find that their sinful course began when they swerved from the Golden Mean. Lot, the nephew of Abraham, heeded the call of God and left pagan Ur. But when he was settled in the new country he allowed his selfish desires to pull him into the rich valley of the Jordan with its cities of sin. He was led into excess, and his deviation from the narrow and harder way ended with disgrace for his family and death for most of his loved ones.

Samson would have been a mighty spiritual leader in Israel if he could have controlled his desires. The physical giant was always going to extremes. His muscles were as strong as steel, but his will power melted away in the furnace of adversity. One moment the Spirit of God could make him a master of the Philistines, but the next moment he was helplessly trapped by the wily devices of Delilah. Samson was blind to the guiding star of his life before his eyes were put out by his enemies. When Samson closed the door to sin at one entrance, he allowed himself to be led into temptation at another door. Milton puts these words in his mouth:

"What boots it at one gate to make defense, And at another to let in the foe?" [7]

Unless we bar well all avenues of temptation, and live a well-rounded Christian life, we shall be led into excess and sin. In the thirty-three years that Jesus lived upon the earth He left a perfect example of a balanced life. The Master did not go to extremes; He made physical, mental, social, and spiritual growth. Jesus was a master among the learned scholars, and yet He could speak and teach so simply that peasants and fishermen heard Him gladly. His physical powers must have been well developed, for Jesus was a carpenter, and the manual labor required in those days to saw and plane the rough timbers was much greater than we know in our time. Yet the Master did not use His physical resources in a reckless manner. He never burned the candle at both ends.

We see men go to excesses in athletics in a generation that worships the god of sports. We may observe the opposite extreme where individuals become so obsessed with business or study that they take no time for physical exercise or healthful relaxation. As Christian youth we must maintain a steady course between the two evils. It is our duty to develop our bodies for health and strength as temples of God.

Is it impossible to be intemperate in religion asks one. Man is a husk without the development of his spiritual nature; but he may also become fanatical in his ideas concerning religion. Paul observed the Greeks of Athens in the excesses of their pagan worship and he declared that they were "extremely religious." [8]

The youth who studies the Bible carefully and sincerely, who follows the Master in humility, will

Life Begins With God

not be led into extremes in his Christianity. “Those who follow the example of Christ will not be extremists. They will cultivate calmness and self-possession. The peace that was seen in the life of Christ will be seen in their lives.” [9]

Man is a social being. The Father saw that it was not good for man to be alone, and so He created a companion to share his joys and divide his sorrows. Not only the love that creates the home but also the joy of friendship makes our journey in life pleasant. If it were not for association with others we would be like ships upon the sea that never pass a friendly vessel. We find that Jesus was a social being. He attended weddings and feasts, He was surrounded by little children who loved to be near Him, and He drew other people to Him with His strong personality. But the Master was careful not to go to excess in His fellowship with others. He could dismiss the multitude and go alone into the mountains for meditation and prayer. It is well for us to mingle with men, but we must also dismiss the throng that presses about us and be alone with God.

Some young people are in misery when they are alone. They have not found the secret of enjoying the quiet hour of reading, the pursuit of a hobby, or the ability to think for one’s self. It is a good thing to grow as an individual. The trees that stand alone can often endure when trees that have grown close together fall before the tempest. The Golden Mean in social development is the secret of happiness. We were not created to be hermits; neither were we made to be tossed to and fro by careless, unprofitable association.

Our world seems to be at the end of a pendulum, for it swings from one vicious extreme to the other. Men and women throw themselves into pleasure—the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. Amid the intemperance and rioting of a generation given to sin, we may also expect to see the fruits of fanatical zeal. We shall see laws enacted that will force people to be pious by outward actions, but they cannot create a change in the heart. We may find false piety foisted upon nations in an effort to produce the semblance of goodness. Any attempt to change character without the impelling love of God in the life brings smallness of soul and hypocritical actions.

Between these two extremes—intemperate pleasure leading to the lusts of the flesh and fanatical zeal producing false piety—youth who follow Jesus Christ must find their way. The Christian must enter the narrow door that leads to the life beyond. The path is there, for the Son of God blazed the way before us. Christian youth must set his course between Scylla, the monster of excess, and Charybdis, the whirlpools of fanatical narrowness. Even as the Greek youth suffered beneath the discipline of his trainer, so we must be willing to stand firm for principle in this degenerate age, saying with Paul, “I can do anything through Him who gives me strength.” [10]

United for God, youth can set forth upon the road which leads upward. There is no “Dead End” on the King’s highway; it does not lead to excess or extremes that destroy the beauty of a consistent Christian life. We may derive courage and strength from these words: “God will accept the youth with their talent, and their wealth of affection, if they will consecrate themselves to Him. They may reach to the highest point of intellectual greatness; and if balanced by religious principle they can carry forward the work which Christ came from heaven to accomplish, and in thus doing be co-workers with the Master.” [11] God wants balanced men and women who grow into the Christian stature with full mental, spiritual, social, and physical attainments willingly placed on the altar of His service.

17. LIFE TRIUMPHS WITH GOD

IT IS NOT what a man begins, but what he completes that marks his value to society. Though some people with indomitable will may complete their tasks, if at the end they are broken and disillusioned, it cannot be called a triumphant victory. But to the child of God the end of the way is the brightest, for—

“The path of the righteous is like the light of the dawn,
That shines ever more brightly till the day is full.” [1]

School work tests the character of students. I have seen brilliant young people begin the autumn classes with all of the ambition of A students; but some of these same youth lost interest in their books, grew careless about their assignments, and at the end of the term dropped out.

There is a glory in doing creative work. To take screws, wheels, springs, and jewels and make a watch that will keep time with the sun is an achievement. To take a piece of wood and make a violin that

Life Begins With God

will bring forth the sweet notes of Rachmaninov's "Sonata in A Minor" is a gift entrusted to few men. But to take a precious human life, such as is entrusted to every man, and build a character upon which God can set His approval, is the work of a lifetime and the greatest of accomplishments. Our Lord, who declares Himself to be the Alpha of our experience, has also promised to be the Omega, or completion of life.

We shall never know peace until our hearts discover the perspective of eternity. As youth we have looked too long at this present moment; it is time for us to gaze ahead at the ultimate goal. If you are twenty years old, you are designing your career for a life expectancy of about forty five years plus eternity. It is foolish for us to look only at today or tomorrow when we must face the long years before us. Some youth say, "Let me have my fling here and now. Let me eat, drink, and be merry, for who cares about the future?" Such individuals have forgotten that they will probably go on living in this world for many years. They must get out of bed every morning with a conscience to face and a life to build. They cannot pull out by the roots the plants that have sprung up from carelessly planted seed.

A victorious Christian life comes only through a steadfast purpose. With unfaltering aim, Jesus Christ went about His task of saving a lost world. His mother could not understand Him, the neighbors in the old home town ridiculed Him, the church leaders spurned Him, and His disciples ran away in a crisis. Yet John, writing of the Savior's ministry, declares, "He had loved those who were His own in the world, and He loved them to the last." [2] When He died upon the cross He could cry out, "It is finished."

This steadfastness of purpose is essential to Christian development in our unstable age. With the world plunging on in uncertainty, with the foundations of truth cracking under the stress of godless ideologies, it is time for youth to place their hands in the hand of God. Sincere questions are asked by men and women who hunger for God. "Are all my plans, my hopes, and my dreams to be crushed by the explosion of a bomb?" one queries. "Isn't there a higher destiny for us than to be mere cannon fodder?" cries another.

If in this world only we have hope, our life has been a moment of sorrow and disappointment. "Millions of men and women are beginning to suspect that contemporary paganism is little more than a ghastly fraud," writes Donald Blackstone, "which begins by offering humanity everything that it wants and ends; by taking from it almost everything that it holds dear." [3] Christianity is challenged in this hour. Can it restore vision to youth? Can the teachings of Jesus Christ put courage and victory into life?

Here is the answer in the example of Paul of Tarsus. That little man renounced his high position in the Jewish nation to become an apostle of Jesus Christ. He suffered persecution, shipwreck, trial, and imprisonment without a murmur. After all of that he could write these inspiring words: "Wherever I go, thank God, He makes my life a constant pageant of triumph in Christ, diffusing the perfume of His knowledge everywhere by me." [4] That is the Master's design for every life when it has been yielded fully to Him. It is to be a pageant of triumph!

Two contrasting pictures in the book of Revelation bring vivid impressions to the mind. In the first scene we see those who have pushed up the ladder of worldly success—the kings, nobles, rich men, and officers. In the day when Jesus Christ appears in the clouds of heaven they will hide in dens and caves, crying to the rocks, "Fall on us, and conceal us from the sight of Him who is seated on the throne, and from the anger of the Lamb, for the great day of Their anger has come, and who can escape?" [5] There is no climax of victory in their career; without hope and without God their life flickers out in defeat.

In the second scene we are standing in heaven before the throne of God. Here are the redeemed from every nation, people, tribe, and language. In chorus they proclaim: "Our deliverance is the work of our God who is seated on the throne, and of the Lamb."

"Who are these people?" asks a voice.

This magnificent testimony comes as a reply: "They are the people who come through the great persecution, who have washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb." [6]

Here are representatives from earth's last generation who have "come through" in triumph. In a day when spiritual values are in a depression, when moral strength has been dissipated, there will be a faithful minority who "come through." The strength of the Master is with them, and their lives have been purified through His death and intercession.

We need steadfastness in our spiritual life such as the militant Clemenceau possessed in his statesmanship during the dark months of World War I, when he said of his Plans for France, "We will fight it out to the end of the end until the inheritance is won!"

With a living faith in God we can triumph. "In all these things we are more than victorious through Him who loved us." We can never conquer evil in our own strength. It is God who defeats the enemy for us, and if we link our weakness with His strength, the battle is won. Upon this theme Paul speaks: "For I

Life Begins With God

am convinced that neither death nor life nor angels nor their hierarchies nor the present nor the future nor any supernatural forces either of height or depth will be able to separate us from the love God has shown in Christ Jesus our Lord!" [7]

There is only one thing that can sever us from the love of God; there is but one enemy that can bring defeat upon us. It is self. When we allow selfishness to die out of our life, Christ can live in us. Not self, but sacrifice brings the victory to the Christian. "If anyone wants to go with Me," said the Master, "he must disregard himself, and take his cross and follow Me." [8] Life triumphs through humility and sacrifice; the way of the cross leads from this sin-filled world to an eternal home of glory.

One dark night as I stood looking up at the Milky Way girdling the dome of the heavens with its millions of fiery suns, I pondered on how every whirling orb is a part of the Creator's majestic universe. "Our earth is on the map of heaven," I mused. "We are God's' lost colony, and He is anxious to bring us back into His great kingdom."

For six thousand years the enemy of man has held this world and its inhabitants captive. From the courts of heaven the Son of God made His way to an imprisoned human race and ransomed it with His life. As a part of the reclamation project, God is going to restore this earth to its original perfection. I saw a new heaven and a new earth," John affirmed. In vision he heard the words of the Creator, I am making everything new! Write this for these words are trustworthy and true. It is all over!

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." [9]

When Jesus Christ comes again He will take the redeemed from this earth to heaven, where they will reign a thousand years. The earth will undergo a purifying process, for the fires that destroy the wicked will remove all scars of sin. There will come forth from the hands of God a new world, a land of "beginning again" which has been prepared for the overcomers.

Heaven's reclamation of this planet will include a more beautiful and perfect nature than we know today. It will be restored to Edenic glory. In the midst of the earth will be the capital city, New Jerusalem, where the throne of God will be established. The inhabitants will be able to commune with the Father and the Son.

This lost colony of heaven has felt the scourge of sin for six thousand years. When God takes possession of this earth again He will wipe all traces of disease and death from humanity. Here is a health program that has never been equaled in our day of medical research: "There will be no death any longer, nor any grief or crying or pain. The old order has passed away." [10]

Under sin's dominion the world has seen war, famine, and pestilence; but when the Father reclaims our earth He will give us fruit from the tree of life and living water from the river of life. To millions of souls who have known the pangs of hunger, the craze of thirst, or the suffering from intense heat, these words are a comforting promise: "They will never be hungry or thirsty again, and never again will the sun or any burning heat distress them, for the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe every tear from their eyes." [11]

"I don't care about going to heaven," said one red blooded youth, "for I've heard that all we shall do there is sit on clouds and play harps!" That boy had the same misconception of the eternal home that is common to many people. What is wrong with the statement?

First of all, we have found that those who are taken to heaven when Christ comes are not to remain there forever, but they are to dwell on this earth when it has been re-created. Again, they shall not spend eternity in idleness. The dreams of this life will come true in the work we shall be able to do in that better land. There we shall build homes, raise gardens, plant vineyards, and no one shall take them from us. We shall continue our education in God's great university.

If you have been interested in radio engineering, think what it will be to understand the science of communication that is developed between the planets of the universe. If you love to travel you may have the privilege of launching out into space for a million light years to visit the inhabitants of other worlds. If you love music you will have the privilege of studying for thousands of years. If you long to be a master painter you will find, as Rudyard Kipling suggests, real saints to pose for you and all the wonders of creation for you to reproduce in their matchless beauty. Heaven's gift to the faithful followers of God is a new world with all the privileges of development that we have longed to enjoy in this life, but which we could never completely fulfill.

In the triumphant moment when the redeemed of all history shall enter the city of the great King, the magnificent reward will be the paramount thought of the saints. The greatest joy of every soul will be that he can see Jesus Christ, his Redeemer, face to face. This is the fulfillment of our love for Him, the

Life Begins With God

beginning of an eternal friendship with our Elder Brother.

Once a beautiful love grew between a lovely young woman and a strong young man. The only flaw in the romance was that the man was totally blind. However, their love rose above all adversity, and in time they were married. One day a friend asked the sightless husband what he longed to see more than anything else in the world.

“My greatest wish is that I might see the face of my wife,” he quickly replied.

Now, a famous specialist in eye diseases visited the city where this couple lived, and after examining the blind man’s eyes, he offered to perform an operation which might give sight to the man for the first time in his life. When the operation was over and the day came for the bandages to be removed, only the doctor was in the room with the husband and wife. As the man’s eyes saw the light he was almost overwhelmed. He turned to his young wife and stood transfixed as he gazed into her face. He walked closer and put his hands out to touch her cheeks, saying, “My dear, you are so much more beautiful than I had imagined you could be in my blindness. My love for you is greater than ever before.”

In like manner we have groped blindly through a world in blackout. With sin-dimmed eyes we have tried to see Jesus in all His glory, but we could not look upon Him. We have accepted His love and called to Him in faith. What will it be when we shall see Him face to face! “For now we are looking at a dim reflection in a mirror, but then we shall see face to face. Now my knowledge is imperfect, but then I shall know as fully as God knows me.” [12]

How often we have been misunderstood in this world of confusion, but in the new earth we shall know as we are known. Our minds will be led through the vast halls of science where in this life we have stood only on the threshold. “There will be no cruel, deceiving foe to tempt to forgetfulness of God. Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies.” [13]

With all the treasures of the universe before us, we shall know and understand the love of a divine Father in its fullness. The conflict between sin and righteousness will be forever ended, and our life shall be complete in God. Certainly it is worth everything to accept the call of the Master when such a victory is assured to every seeking Christian youth—a life that shall triumph with God!

Life Begins With God

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. DOES LIFE LEAD TO A “DEAD END”?

1. JUNG, C. G., *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, page 264, Harcourt, Brace and Company.
2. ROWLANDSON, MARY W., Narrative. Quoted by Warfel, Gabriel, and Williams in *The American Mind*, page 69, American Book Company.
3. MASTERS, EMAR LEE, *Spoon River Anthology*, “Lucinda Matlock.”
4. CARRIE, ALEXIS, *Man the Unknown*, page 28, Harper and Brothers.
5. WHITTER, JOHN GREENLEAF, “The Eternal Goodness.”
6. SHAKESPEAR, WILLIAM, *Macbeth*, V, iv, 23-28.
7. MUEHLMAN, CONRAD H., “The College Man and Religion in the Future,” in *1938 Essay Annual*, page 164.
8. WHITEHEAD, A. N., *Science and the Modern World*, page 275, The MacMillan Company.
9. ARNOLD, MATTHEW, “Dover Beach.”

2. THE QUEST ETERNAL

1. COWPER, WILLIAM, “Walking With God!”
2. BROWNWG, ROBERT, “Rabbi Ben Ezra.”
3. MARKHAM, EDWIN, *The Shoes of Happiness and Other Poems*, “Victory in Defeat,” page 99, Doubleday, Doran, and Company:

3. PUTTING RELIGION IN THE ANTIQUE SHOP

1. JUNG, DR. C. G., quoted by Dorothy Giles in *Hearst’s International Cosmopolitan*, January, 1938, page 135.
2. BELL, BERNARD IDDINGS, *Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 150, No. 3, p. 317, September, 1932.
3. BERDYAEV, NICHOLAS, *The Fate of Man in the Modern World*, page 6.
4. WHITE, E. G., *Education*, page 57.

4. THE LABORATORY VERSUS THE CHURCH

1. WATSON, WILLIAM, “The Sovereign Poet.”
2. COTTON, ED. H. (ed.), *Has Science Discovered God?* page 88.
3. Psalm 19:1, 2.
4. Hebrews 11: 6.
5. Psalm 139:1, 2.
6. NOYES, ALFRED, *The Torchbearers*, “Watchers of the Sky,” Section V, on Newton, page 230, Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1922.
7. HANKEY, DONALD, *A Student in Arms*, page 190.
8. HOUSMAN, A. E., *A Shropshire Lad*, LX, Illustrated Editions Company, Inc.

5. THE GUIDEBOOK FOR ADVENTURERS

1. Daniel 6:22.
2. Luke 23:40-43.
3. John 5: 39.
4. 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.
5. 2 Peter 1:21.
6. Jeremiah 15:16.
7. Isaiah 8:20, Authorized Version.

Life Begins With God

8. WORDSWORTH, WILLIAM, "A Poet's Epitaph."
9. WHITTIER, JOHN G., "The Bible."
10. TENNYSON, ALFRED LORD, "Merlin and the Gleam."

6. WHAT CAN A MAN BELIEVE?

1. MEREDITH, GEORGE, "Modern Love."
2. 1 John 2:5, 6.
3. Hebrews 11:6.
4. Psalm 42:1-3.
5. John 14:9.
6. Exodus 34:6,7.
7. WELLS, H. G., God the Invisible King, pages 55, 56.
8. James 1:23-25.
9. 2 Timothy 1: 12.
10. Matthew 5:17,18.
11. Psalm 40:8.
12. Matthew 22:37.
13. Matthew 22:39.
14. 2 Timothy 4:3, 4.

7. IS SIN A MYTH?

1. John 1: 1-3.
2. Colossians 1: 16.
3. Ezekiel 28:12-16.
4. Ezekiel 28:17.
5. Isaiah 14:13,14.
6. John 3:16.
7. Isaiah 1: 18,19.
8. 1 John 1: 9.

8. THE PIONEER OF LIFE

1. WHITMAN, WALT, "Pioneers! O Pioneers!"
2. Luke 2:14.
3. Luke 2: 11.
4. Matthew 1: 21.
5. John 14:6.
6. Hebrews 4: 15.
7. Luke 22:42.
8. Hebrews 4:14.
9. Genesis 3: 5.
10. Genesis 6: 5.
11. Mark 2:27; 3:4.
12. Philippians 4:8.
13. TENNYSON, ALFRED LORD, "Sir Galahan."
14. Dixon, W. MACNEILE, The Human Situation, page 425, Longmans, Green & Company.
15. John 14:2, 3.

9. THE ROAD BACK

1. Romans 5: 6.
2. Proverbs 14:12.

Life Begins With God

3. James 1:23-25.
4. WHITMAN, WALT, "Song of Myself."
5. Romans 3:20.
6. Psalm 119:130.
7. Romans 7:24,25.
8. Ephesians 1: 7, 8.
9. Acts 3:19.
10. 2 Corinthians 7:10.
11. SHAKESPEARE, WILLIAM, Richard III, V, iii, 194-197.
12. Proverbs 28:13.
13. 1 John 1:9.
14. James 5:16.
15. Ephesians 4:23, 24, 28.
16. John 3:3.
17. Psalm 103:12.
18. Romans 1:16.
19. Acts 5:32.

10. THE GOLD STANDARD OF MORALS

1. GILBERT, DAN, Poison Peddlers, page 14, Zondervan Publishing House.
2. ARNOLD, MATTHEW, "Myserinus."
3. Matthew 5: 17.
4. Matthew 7:12.
5. 1 Corinthians 13: 1.
6. John 14: 15.
7. NEWELL, REVEREND OLIVER S., in New York Times, April 15, 1940.
8. BROOKE, STOPFORD, "Three Men Went Out on a Summer Night."
9. Matthew 19:16-21.
10. WHITE, E. G., The Desire of Ages, page 520.
11. KENNEDY, G. A. STUDDERT, The Word and the Work, page 80, Longmans, Green & Company.

11. LOOK HOMEWARD, CHRISTIAN

1. Revelation 1: 7.
2. Matthew 24:27, 30.
3. John 14:2,3.
4. Acts 1: 11.
5. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18.
6. 2 Peter 1: 16.
7. 2 Peter 3:3, 4.
8. 2 Peter 3: 10.
9. Revelation 1:7; 22:20.
10. Matthew 24:6-8.
11. WALLACE, HENRY A., in New York Times Magazine, May 5, 1940.
12. Isaiah 51:6.
13. KIPLING, RUDYARD, "Recessional."
14. 1 John 3:1
15. Matthew 24:42.

12. THE TEST OF ALLEGIANCE

1. John 14: 15.
2. Exodus 20: 11.

Life Begins With God

3. Genesis 2:2, 3.
4. Matthew 12:12.
5. Daniel 7:25.
6. Acts 5: 29.
7. Ezekiel 20:12.
8. Ecclesiastes 12: 1.
9. HAWTHORNE, NATHANIEL, Works, vol. 1, p. 17 (Old Manse edition).
10. Isaiah 66:23.
11. Psalm 118:24.

13. "A THING OF BEAUTY"

1. TENNYSON, ALFRED LORD, Idylls of the King, "The Passing of Arthur."
2. FULLER, ETHEL ROMIG, Kitchen Sonnets, "Proof," Binfords and Mort, Publishers.
3. MAUS, CYNTHIA PEARL, Christ and the Fine Arts, page 287.
4. Matthew 26:39.
5. BELL, BERNARD IDDINGS, "Why People Do Not Pray," Atlantic Monthly, April, 1940, page 531.
6. Luke 22:31,32.
7. John 17: 11.
8. Hebrews 7:25.
9. Exodus 25:8.
10. Matthew 21:13.
11. WHITE, E. G., Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 491.
12. ATWATER, GEORGE P., "The Ministry: An Overcrowded Profession," Atlantic Monthly, October, 1911, pages 483, 484.
13. WHITE, E. G., Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 496.
14. Psalm 122: 1.
15. Isaiah 26:20.

14. THE SYMPHONY OF LIFE

1. Romans 14:7.
2. Hebrews 12:2.
3. Philippians 3:13,14.
4. WHITE, E. G., Patriarchs and Prophets, page 638.
5. MILTON, JOHN, "Sonnet on His Blindness."
6. John 3:30.
7. RUSKIN, JOHN, Ethics of the Dust, Lecture IV, "The Crystal Orders."
8. WORDSWORTH, WILLIAM, "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey."
9. Revelation 14:2, 3.

15. IT'S DANGEROUS TO THINK

1. Ecclesiastes 7:29.
2. WHITE E. G., The Ministry of Healing, page 439.
3. Psalm 10:4.
4. Luke 17:27.
5. Genesis 6: 5.
6. Matthew 22:37.
7. Philippians 2:5, R. V.
8. 2 Corinthians 10:5.
9. Hebrews 4:12.
10. Psalm 119: 11.
11. WHITE E. G., Education, page 18.

Life Begins With God

12. 1 Corinthians 2:2.
13. 2 Timothy 1: 12.
14. Malachi 3:16.
15. Philippians 4:8.

16. THE GOLDEN MEAN

1. DURANT, WILLIAM, *The Life of Greece*, pages 213-216, Simon and Schuster, Inc.
2. *The Golden Sayings of Epictetus* (trans. Hastings Crossley),
Number CIV, paragraphs 1, 2 (Harvard Classics, volume 2, page 155).
3. 1 Corinthians 9:24-26.
4. Matthew 7:13,14.
5. Isaiah 30:21.
6. Philippians 3:14.
7. MILTON, JOHN, *Samson Agonistes*, lines 560, 561.
8. Acts 17:22.
9. WHITE E. G., *Gospel Workers*, page 317.
10. Philippians 4:13.
11. WHITE E. G., *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, page 48.

17. LIFE TRIUMPHS WITH GOD

1. Proverbs 4:18.
2. John 13:1.
3. BLACKSTONE, DONALD, "Christianity and the Irreligious," *Christian Herald*,
September, 1940, page 35.
4. 2 Corinthians 2:14, Moffatt.
9. Revelation 6:16,17.
6. Revelation 7:10,14.
7. Romans 8:37-39.
8. Mark 8:34.
9. Revelation 21:4, 5, 6.
10. Revelation 21:4.
11. Revelation 7:16,17.
12. 1 Corinthians 13:12.
13. WHITE, E. G., *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, page 677.