

3 JOHN 11, 12

A MISSIONARY RESPECTED BY ALL

“Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.”¹

Modern Christians are poorly taught about missionary labours. This situation is not wholly the fault of individual Christians; the subject of missions is often neglected from the pulpit. This may be in part because contemporary Christians have been indoctrinated both by the world and by religious leaders to believe that missionary work is cultural imperialism. Whatever our reason for ignoring the mandate of the Master to carry the message of life into all the world, the churches appear woefully ignorant of missions.

I want to suggest that one primary reason we do not witness the vigorous missionary advance that characterised previous generations, is that we do not know what our mission is. Missions depend upon mission. If our mission is to huddle in holy enclaves, than we are fulfilling in admirable fashion the mandate we received from the Master. If, however, our mission is to make disciples, we are failing miserably.

On one occasion, Charles Spurgeon, the noted Baptist divine of nineteenth century London, preaching from the final verses of Mark’s Gospel, related the account of an exchange between an army chaplain and the Duke of Wellington. This is a transcription of his illustration. “An army chaplain once said to the Duke of Wellington, ‘Do you think that it is of any use our taking the gospel to the hill tribes in India? Will they ever receive it?’ The duke replied, ‘What are your marching orders?’ That was the only answer he gave. Stern disciplinarian as that great soldier was, he only wanted marching orders, and he obeyed; and he meant that every soldier of the cross must obey the marching orders of Christ, his great Commander. Go ye, therefore, as far as ever your position and capabilities allow you, and tell to every creature the word of the gospel as it is recorded in my text, ‘He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.’”²

Nothing has changed in the intervening years. Christ is still on the throne. The charge given to His disciples yet stands. The world is still lost. Mankind still teeters on the brink of eternity. We who have heard the Gospel still have the message of life. Christians are yet accountable to Him to fulfil His command. Not only are we responsible to be on mission with God, but we are responsible to be missionary-minded. We are accountable to God to pray for the Lord of the Harvest to thrust forth labourers into His fields, and we are responsible both to go and to assist those who go from our churches.

In this brief missive from the Apostle of Love, we saw that John registered not just disapproval, but something akin to horror at the thought that a church leader would not eagerly receive missionaries when opportunity was presented. Moreover, word had reached the aged Apostle that the particular church leader in question had not only refused to accept itinerating missionaries in his church, but he had debarred members of the congregation who wished to receive them, even going so far as to dismiss them from the congregation in some instances.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² C. H. Spurgeon, “Baptism Essential to Obedience,” **Spurgeon’s Sermons: Volume 39** (electronic ed., Logos Library System, Ages Software: Albany, OR) 1998

Diotrephes epitomised evil, and John identifies him as evil; his actions were unconscionable and unworthy of the Master. Contrasted to him was someone named Demetrius. It seems appropriate to conclude that Demetrius was one of the missionaries turned away by Diotrephes—perhaps he was even the leader of the missionary band. John speaks highly of him, holding him up as one worthy of receiving support from the churches because he had a good reputation with all who knew him, and especially enjoyed a good reputation with the Apostle.

Generally, those appointed to the Master's service should be respected by all Christians, though that seldom works out in practise. As an aside, if a young man considers the ministry of Christ, believing that he will enjoy the respect of others, he should find another calling. The Apostles, the prophets and even those who have served as preachers of the Word, are often maligned and despised by the world. Let's look at the issues as presented in the Word.

DEMETRIUS HAS RECEIVED A GOOD TESTIMONY FROM EVERYONE — “Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone.” The statement is obviously exaggerated to provide emphasis. It seems fair to say that it is doubtful that Diotrephes would have given him a good testimony. However, for the most part Demetrius appears to have conducted himself with integrity and honour, and was therefore, held in esteem by most believers that knew him.

Even outsiders are compelled to speak well of believers who conduct themselves honourably. We would each do well to remember the admonition that Peter gave to believers. “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” [1 PETER 2:12]. When we unpack this instruction we see that even unbelieving people know in reality the good that those who love God have done. Though pagans delight to find fault with every servant of God, they are compelled by the evidence to grudgingly give glory to God for the good that is done. They are incapable of explaining the benevolence done by servants of God.

While the sins of the professed servants of God are trumpeted abroad, little is said of the good that has been accomplished. As one example, consider that recently the news media is taking great delight in exposing every real or imagined sin committed by homosexual Catholic priests. This entity is but the latest in a string of religious organisations to receive such scrutiny. Though the media are careful to speak of paedophile priests, it is abundantly obvious that the genesis of the problem was the admission of homosexuals to the priesthood.

I am not an apologist for the Catholic Church; however, honesty compels me to say that the percentage of priests that have been exposed as sexual predators is miniscule when compared to the numbers that seek to fulfil the work for which they trained. Moreover, the same media that eagerly broadcasts the sins of these few is almost silent concerning an apparently greater number of sexual predators in the fields of education and politics; and accounts of the good that is quietly accomplished on a daily basis by Catholic charities is ignored. The work of charities such as hospitals, crisis pregnancy centres, food banks, adoption agencies and multiplied other Catholic charities is ignored, except when such labours run afoul of political correctness. The studied ignorance of the good work provided by essentially all Christian charities is evident.

Little was ever said of the labours of Mother Teresa until quite late in her service to India. Scant attention is paid to Franklin Graham and the work of Samaritan's Purse, except when Mr. Graham makes a statement concerning Muslim intolerance. Few stories were ever written about Jerry Falwell's provision of care for unwed mothers or his work to assist alcoholics and drug addicts to be freed of their addictions. I recall no news accounts of the work of W. A. Criswell and the First Baptist Church of Dallas in ministering among the impoverished of Dallas County.

The fact is that we who are believers in the Risen Son of God do not serve in order to gain the accolades of this dying world in which we live—we serve because we are impelled by the Spirit of God who dwells in us and because we seek to honour Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. In the course of serving God, we know that the pagans are aware of the good that we do, even if governmental policies sometimes seek to co-opt the work performed or if political efforts endeavour to compel us to agree with the evil that is officially promoted.

Ultimately, despite the self-serving condemnation arising from unsaved anthropologists or the blatantly ignorant ruminations of self-important politicians, the world knows that Christians seek to do good and that in the course of doing what honours God they will reveal and declare the grace of God and His salvation. The unbelieving world is compelled by facts to acknowledge that we bless mankind because we seek to honour God.

As I prepared the message this week, I read an account detailing the labours of servants of the Saviour who toil in the shadows. It is doubtful that you will ever read such an article in the mainstream media, much less hear an account on the nightly news. However, the account details the heart-rending labours of believers who are ignored by the world. Listen to this excerpt from a report published by Baptist Press.

“A baby girl, only a few hours old, is carried to her execution.

“The woman who holds her calls herself a midwife, but everyone in this Indian slum knows who she really is: the bringer of death.

“As the woman approaches the pressure cooker, the baby's mother does nothing. She has already paid, after all, about 30 cents for her newborn daughter to be boiled alive.

“The woman lowers the squirming infant into the water. The lid snaps shut. The flames rise. Then the infant's scalded corpse is tossed to the dogs for them to devour.

“Even more common, a mother refuses to nurse her starving baby until the ‘midwife’ arrives to silence her infant daughter's pleading cries with a bottle of poison and cold indifference.

“If the mother cannot find help, she kills the child herself. Then she unceremoniously buries her baby beneath her house, perhaps beside other daughters discarded before this baby.

“How could a mother murder her own child?

...

“Such questions probe the depths of human depravity—and the passionate efforts of Christians who, at least in their small corner of India, may finally be turning the tide.”³

The account continues by telling how funds from Southern Baptists are funding the rescue of unwanted infants. The formation of an ongoing rescue effort grew out of an after school program to feed and educate over two hundred children from the slums of an Indian city. However, parents are still trapped in the old ways of doing things; they cannot afford to provide a dowry for a daughter, so they kill daughters in their infancy. An orphanage for unwanted children is being built; it grew out of the heart of compassion of the Saviour. The effort to save unwanted infants seems pitifully inadequate in the face of the overwhelming cultural attitudes of animosity toward females, but it grows because of Christian love.

A world which no longer values the life of unborn infants, and which is seemingly unconcerned about life for the elderly or those whose existence inconveniences others, takes scant notice of the work of these fellow believers in a distant land. It is as though our attitude can be described by the sentiment, “So a baby girl dies! It is one less mouth to feed.”

³ Marcus Rowntree, “Christians fight infant killing in Indian slum,” Baptist Press, April 16, 2010, <http://www.bpnews.net/BPnews.asp?ID=32730>, accessed 16 April 2010

We have forgotten in our world that the services of compassion that are provided in this present world were not created by government. It was Christians—believers in the Living Saviour who had received the grace of God and who reflected the love of God—who first established hospitals, orphanages, homes for the aged, food banks and multiplied services to alcoholics, street people and rescue ministries to women trapped in prostitution. Whenever government has assumed responsibility for such services, they shortly degenerate into activities that are conducted according to accounting principles. While church schools in Canada have taken a beating in the press in recent years, may I remind you that it was when those services began to be funded by government that they degenerated into something less than opportunities to demonstrate the grace and the goodness of God.

Make no mistake, when Christians conduct their ministries without accepting governmental control over their conduct and without accepting governmental funding, they bless the people whom they serve. Whenever the people of God compromise their principles to accept government sponsorship, it has inevitably resulted in government control, and with government control has come spiritual accommodation and ultimately disappointment. So long as the people of God conduct themselves according to the revealed mind of the Saviour, all mankind speaks well of them—perhaps grudgingly, but assuredly, all people recognise the good that we do.

“Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good” [3 JOHN 11]. John’s statement is asyndetic for emphasis! Christians must take account of the conduct of their lives to ensure that they imitate good. Ask yourself this question: “In ten years, will the things I am doing today have made any lasting impact for good and for God on the world? In twenty years, will the things I am now doing have delayed the progress of evil? In one hundred years, if Christ tarries, will my presence have made a lasting impression for good in the lives of those who follow?”

John makes a most astonishing statement at this point: “Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.” Those who know God will do good; those who have never known God cannot do good. May I remind you that the world is incapable of doing good. Though they can recognise good, they cannot do good. They are compelled to redefine “good” to salve their conscience against the condemnation they feel because of the evil that marks them.

In that vein I recall a woman with whom I spoke on one occasion some years ago. The congregation I then pastored advertised the services in a local paper. The ad copy changed on a weekly basis, and one week we had run an ad that invited people to celebrate “National Atheist Day” on April first. The ad copy then cited **PSALM 14:1**: “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” To say the ad generated controversy is understatement.

One woman in particular stands out because of our conversation. She phoned and began to berate me as pastor of a congregation that would run such a hateful ad. “I’m an atheist,” she declared, “and I’m a good person.”

“Who told you that you are a good person?” I queried.

Taken aback by the question, she responded, “Well, my parents.”

Again, I questioned, “And who told you parents what is good?”

Cautiously, she replied, “Well, my grandparents.”

“And who told your grandparents what is good?” I asked yet again.

“I know what you are getting at,” she blustered. “Good is whatever society says is good.”

“Is it good to kill Jews?” I asked.

“Well, no,” she said in a startled voice. “I’m a Jew. It wouldn’t be a good thing to kill a Jew.”

“But, if we lived in Germany circa 1939 it would be a good thing to kill Jews because society concluded that killing Jews was a good thing,” I replied.

“Oh, my,” she said, “I didn’t think of that.”

Throughout the remainder of our conversation, I continued to press the point—apparently novel to her—that good is always determined according to a fixed standard; and the standard for determining what is good, and consequently, what is evil, is by measuring an attitude or an action against the perfect standard of Jesus, who is the Messiah.

Too many of us who are Christians content ourselves to aim for morality; and even then we are willing to lower our aim if it is inconvenient or difficult. We need to aim above morality, aiming for good as defined by the Saviour. We must not be content with being good, but aim to be good for something; and the something for which we need to be good is for the glory of Jesus the Master.

DEMETRIUS RECEIVED A GOOD TESTIMONY FROM THE TRUTH ITSELF — “Demetrius has received a good testimony ... from the truth itself.” The reason Demetrius received a good testimony from all who knew him was that he lived according to the truth. For too long, we Christians have compartmentalised our lives. We perform our religious duties; then, the remainder of our lives is lived according as we desire without thought of what the will of God might be. It often appears as if we are prepared to give Christ a portion of our lives, but we are yet unwilling to surrender control over the entirety of our lives to the Master. To some extent, we excuse this attitude since Christ can only be described as “Other!” However, we must face the fact that this is “the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” [GALATIANS 2:20]. As Christians, it is not as if a stranger was seeking to reign over us.

I realise we live in a day in which professing Christian decry doctrinal preaching. “Doctrine is dry and dull,” these ignorant souls whine. “It’s boring to hear doctrine.” However, we need to ask cavilling Christians, “Is truth boring? Is life and that which adds spice to life dull and dry?” Learning the character of the Author of Life and discovering of His will for those whom He created is neither boring nor dull. The only reason we could ever think that doctrine is dull is if we attempt to create a repository where musty truths are stored away and only taken out on the occasional Sunday as a demonstration of our spiritual acumen; and we then struggle to cope with life, relying solely upon our pitiful skill and abject abilities the remainder of the week. God’s truth is given to give us joy and to enable us to fulfil the purpose for which we were created. The Westminster divines were assuredly correct when they avowed, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever.”

Doctrine was never meant to be isolated from daily living. Truth, given by the God who is true, is meant to permeate the being of those who are called by the Name of the Risen Saviour. Our decisions are to be moulded and controlled by the truths God has revealed; our daily actions are to be guided by the truth of God revealed through His Word. Doctrine has been given to guide our thinking and to direct our steps. God’s desire is that each of His children should know His Word and apply the truths of His Word in their daily lives.

The truth that the Bible is the Word of God should provide us comfort in the certainty that in the pages of this book are wisdom and knowledge to meet every contingency of life. Indeed, the Psalmist has written:

“Your Word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.”

[PSALM 119:105]

In the Word of God we are taught that God is sovereign. If we truly believe this truth, we will live boldly and fearlessly. Isaiah has testified:

“Behold, God is my salvation;
I will trust, and will not be afraid;
for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song,
and He has become my salvation.”

[ISAIAH 12:2]

We are taught that the congregation of the Lord is beloved by God with whose blood she was purchased [see ACTS 20:28]. Since this is true, can any professing Christian justify treating the congregation of the Lord with disdain, showing up to the services when it is convenient and demanding that the assembly accede to her every whim? If we truly believe this is the Body of Christ, can we honestly continue to hold ourselves aloof, refusing to commit to the Body of Christ? The Apostle to the Gentiles wrote of the local church, “God has so composed the body, giving greater honour to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.” Then, he appends this final statement, “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:24-27].

Indeed, we are taught in the Word, “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” [HEBREWS 10:24, 25]. As the Day of Christ nears, and surely we are closer to that day than when this imperative was written, we are to encourage one another, making a concerted effort to meet with the assembly of the righteous. If we know the Day is nearing, then we are to do this with even greater urgency.

You see, then, how that doctrine dictates how we live, if we actually understand what is taught and how it relates to godliness. The instruction of the Word is not given for the mere acquisition of information—it is training in righteousness and instruction in how to live so that we will be pleasing before the Master. Doctrine is so important that God give us teachers, who together with other gifted men are “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” [EPHESIANS 4:12-16].

Perhaps we who are preachers fail to declare the truth that Christ must be Master of all, or He will not be Master at all. Too often we appear to hold the opinion that we can perform some religious ceremony and it will assuage the displeasure of Holy God. I remind you of the Word that is declared so frequently from this pulpit. Jesus, the Son of God, died because of our sin and was raised to declare us right with the Father. Now, the Word calls each person, inviting all: “Say the welcoming word to God—‘Jesus is my Master’—embracing, body and soul, God’s work of doing in us what He did in raising Jesus from the dead. That’s it. You’re not ‘doing’ anything; you’re simply calling out to God, trusting Him to do it for you. That’s salvation. With your whole being you embrace God setting things right, and then you say it, right out loud: ‘God has set everything right between Him and me’” [ROMANS 10:9, 10].⁴ If we call Him Master, He must be Master. These are not mere words; this is a full commitment to Him as Ruler of life.

⁴ The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2002)

Perhaps we Christians have become so thoroughly indoctrinated in the attitudes of this fallen world that we are incapable of living with radical abandon; we appear to enjoy the mundane, pedestrian lifestyle that dares not rock the boat and refuses to disturb anyone with the demand for righteousness. Almost a century before this present day, Henry David Thoreau wrote, “Most men live lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them.” He was correct! One reason this is correct is that we do not realise the position we occupy in Christ Jesus. In a sermon entitled, “The Weight of Glory,” C. S. Lewis challenged believers when he said, “If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”⁵

Did you catch that? If we could but realise what God has planned for us, we would seek to bring all that we are able to the Faith we have received. We would not be content to sing a few desultory songs in a lackadaisical manner and say that we had worshipped. We would not settle for going through the motions of doing church—sitting with plastic smiles, drowsily listening to the minister drone on about God, and reciting prayers as though sending an Email to an unseen, distant acquaintance. Were we convinced of the glory that we will share, we would be content with nothing less than the knowledge that we had met the Risen, Living Son of God. Throughout the week preceding our service we would prepare ourselves to meet Him, and then we would come to the service of worship anticipating that we would meet Him.

And the excitement of anticipation would not cease with the benediction of the service. We would leave the assembly looking for opportunity to do good to others, endeavouring to bless them with the knowledge of Christ by telling them of the Saviour and seeking to honour the Master by doing the things that He assigned us to do as His disciples.

Paul, quoting Isaiah, reminded the Corinthian Christians:

“‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man imagined,
what God has prepared for those who love him’—

“these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit” [1 CORINTHIANS 2:9, 10].

Therefore, we are not speaking of things that are ephemeral, evanescent or esoteric; we are speaking of the truths of God’s revelation given to His people by the Spirit He caused to dwell in us and by His Word. Those who walk with Christ are recognised as belonging to Him. Those who live by the truth have received a good testimony from the truth; that is, they live consistent with the truth they profess.

There is a new and continuing scandal surrounding rogue preachers in every decade. During the eighties, Christendom was scandalised by the spectacle of major televangelists whose sins were put on display for the amusement of the world. In the nineties, Canadian Anglicans and the United Church of Canada were shocked to learn of the sinful actions of ministers within those communions. In this present decade, throughout the world we are witnessing and ongoing exposure of Catholic priests who are paedophiles.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” sermon preached at Oxford, University Church of Saint Mary the Virgin, June 8, 1941, http://www.archive.org/stream/weightofgloryand012281mbp/weightofgloryand012281mbp_djvu.txt, accessed 17 April 2010

The story that hasn't been told is of multitudes of godly servants that live by the truth and who are a blessing to multiplied needy souls. Throughout our nation, Christians fed the hungry and counsel the confused. They clothed the naked and consoled the frightened. They preach peace to those in turmoil and minister to the sick and dying. They do this without requiring payment for their service, and without expectation of recognition. They are motivated by love for the Master, who taught them, "Proclaim as you go, saying 'The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay" [MATTHEW 10:7, 8].

Let me point out a certainty to guide you whenever you read of new scandals. Whenever someone counterfeits money, he does not counterfeit a dime or a quarter. Only bills representing great value are counterfeited. Moreover, a counterfeiter will not produce a three-dollar bill. He does not counterfeit that which is false. In the realm of the Faith, Satan does not produce cheap counterfeits; he attempts to counterfeit that which has value in the estimate of the people.

Those preachers that have been exposed as fraudulent and phoney were counterfeits of that which is recognised as intrinsically valuable. Moreover, the evil one never creates counterfeit cultists, because they are recognised as false in the first place. Satan counterfeits that which is genuine and true. I suggest that we will see a continual stream of fallen preachers, the most of whom have never known the Master, being but pretenders to grace. Such people will never have received a good testimony from the truth because they have never known the truth. It is as John has said, those who are opposed to grace "went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us" [1 JOHN 2:19].

DEMETRIUS RECEIVED A GOOD TESTIMONY FROM THE APOSTLE — "We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true." John testifies that he willingly adds his voice in testimony to the veracity of the calling and the service of Demetrius. Throughout the pages of the New Testament, what activities merited commendation from an Apostle? Surprisingly, there are but few instances in the New Testament letters in which an Apostle specifically commends an action. The Apostle commended Phoebe as a deacon of the Church at Cenchreae [ROMANS 16:1]. This is actually a recommendation, but a tacit commendation, of her character as he certifies her to the Christians in Rome. Apparently, then, faithful service that blessed the people of God was commendable in the eyes of an Apostle.

In another instance, Paul points to his own life and the life of those travelling with him in service to the Master as he urges the Corinthian Christians onward toward righteousness. Listen to his recitation of apostolic life, noting especially the praiseworthy aspects of life. "We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honour and dishonour, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything" [2 CORINTHIANS 6:3-10]. Harmless toward others, endurance, purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the presence of the Spirit, love, truthful speech and divine power are all commendable. Continuing as a Christian warrior despite every hardship is commendable.

There is another instance in the Letter to Corinthian Christians when the Apostle commended the Christians in Corinth. Paul commended them because they remembered him, obviously remembering his instruction and the training he had given, and because they continued to maintain the traditions (in particular, the observance of the Lord's Table) he has instituted in the congregation [**1 CORINTHIANS 11:2**]. From this commendation, it is apparent that remembering what was taught and adhering to the practises of the Faith are commendable.

By the same token, failure to worship properly—ignoring the need of fellow believers, treating the Lord's Table as an act of private worship rather than seeing the broader implication of the act as corporate worship, failure to recognise the Body of Christ—merit censure. As Paul opens the instruction to Corinthians concerning the Lord's Table, he excoriates these saints. "In the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse" [**1 CORINTHIANS 11:17**]. Shortly, he will again raise the issue of their reducing this act of worship to a private matter when he writes, "What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not" [**1 CORINTHIANS 11:22**].

Paul will urge the Christians in Philippi to focus on actions and attitudes that are worthy of commendation in others. He instructs believers, "Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" [**PHILIPPIANS 4:8**]. Certainly, actions that reflect truth, honour, justice, purity or beauty are commendable; but Paul is cautious to note that there exist other actions beyond these that merit commendation when he speaks of "whatever is commendable." Christians are urged to be quick to commend attitudes and actions that reflect the glory of Christ the Lord.

Beyond this, we are urged to commend, or praise, God Himself because the faith we hold is proven genuine when it is tested [**see 1 PETER 1:7**]. We are also called to praise Him because of the righteousness of Christ that is displayed through our lives since we have been saved [**PHILIPPIANS 1:11**]. Listen to one other passage in which we are taught to commend God, noting especially the reasons for such praise. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

"In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory" [**EPHESIANS 1:3-14**].

God is to be commended, or praised, because he chose us in Jesus His Son, because He predestined us for adoption, because He redeemed us, because He has lavished on us His grace, because He has revealed His will to us, because He has given us an inheritance, and because He sealed us with His Holy Spirit.

God is in the business of saving lost people, and He is to be praised for His mercy. Have you received the mercy of God? Have you received the forgiveness of sin? Do you know the hope that is ours in Christ the Lord? The Word of God tells us that Jesus, the Son of God, died because of the sin of fallen people. He was buried, and on the third day He broke the bonds of death and rose from the tomb. All this is academic, at best, until you personally come to know this Risen Saviour.

This is the reason the Word of God instructs all who are willing to receive the Word, “If you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with God, and with the mouth that one confesses and is saved.” The passage concludes with God’s promise that, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**].⁶ We pray you are a Christian, that you have believed and that your sin is forgiven. If this is not the case, believe this message now and receive the gift of life offered in Jesus the Lord. Amen.

⁶ Free translation by the author