

## PHILIPPIANS 1:18-30

### ACT LIKE MEN! HONOUR.

“In every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

“Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”<sup>1</sup>

**S**landered! Threatened! Beaten and brutalised! Imprisoned! This was life as an apostle. There was nothing easy about being a believer in the early days of the Faith, and to be identified as an Apostle meant extreme hardship. Near the end of his earthly days, the Apostle wrote of the pressure he faced because of his faith. This is what he wrote of his life. “Whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?” Then, the weary saint speaks a pointed truth when he writes, “If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness” [2 CORINTHIANS 11:21b-30].

Life as a Christian is never easy—not if that life is real. Life as one who would honour the Master is demanding. Because this life is challenging, because this life is demanding, it calls for men and women of integrity. If someone invites you to be a Christian, endeavouring to induce your agreement by stating the benefits of the Faith without warning of the consequences of accepting this Faith, they are dissembling. Because He is God, He is worthy of our best.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

The Faith demands commitment of those who name the Name of Christ. Opposition will only increase as the Age nears its consummation. Moreover, the opposition will come from within as well as without. In his final warning to the elders of Ephesus, the Apostle Paul warned, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them” [ACTS 20:28-30].

His warning anticipates warnings issues by other Apostles. John has written, “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. They 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 2:18, 19].

Similarly, Peter has warned, “False prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep” [2 PETER 2:1-3].

Commitment implies far more than merely continuing in the Faith. Assuredly, it does mean that; but it speaks of the mindset of those who follow the Master. It says that those who follow the Christ are determined that they are not merely practising a religion—they have willingly placed themselves under the reign of Him who claims the right of mastery over their lives. This is forgotten too often in modern church life: Jesus Christ is Master. We recite the words without thinking of the meaning of what we are saying. “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10]. Indeed, faith saves and the faith that saves leads the individual openly to declare allegiance to Him who saves. The faith that saves brings the child of God to the point of openly declaring Him who saves as master over life.

Because He is Master, the redeemed individual wants to honour Him. Just as we wanted to honour our parents by obeying them, so we want to honour the Master through obedience to Him. Just as we honoured our parents by speaking well of them, so we will honour the Master by speaking well of Him. Just as we honoured our parents by doing all possible not to disgrace their name, so we who are saved do everything possible to avoid disgracing the Name by which we are called. We seek to honour the Master.

Thus it is that in our text we witness the Apostle speaking of his desire to honour the Master. In fact, he identifies some of the specific areas in which he strives to honour the Lord. His effort is not deterred by some who act dishonourably; rather, he looks at what is actually going on and draws comfort in the knowledge that the message of life is spread—even though the motives of some declaring the Faith are less than honourable. Just so, we can draw comfort that the Master rules overall and overrules all that occurs. Join me in exploring Paul’s example of acting honourably so that together we draw fresh inspiration to the praise of Christ’s glory.

**CRITERION FOR REJOICING** — “In every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.”

When he thought about the preaching that took place, the Apostle considered what was accomplished through declaration of the message; he did not focus solely on the motive. Understand that motive is important, even vital. God explores the motive behind our actions. Mere mortals, however, are incapable of knowing the motive for a given action. Think of what the writer of the Letter to Hebrew Christians has written: “The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” **[HEBREWS 4:12, 13]**.

Consider what is affirmed in this statement. God knows the thoughts and intentions of the heart; He is able to both decipher what is indecipherable to us and understand what we do. However, you and I are incapable of knowing what motivates a person. We are able to witness actions, but we cannot truly determine why an individual acts as he or she does. Penologists imagine that they can discern remorse, and they present themselves as experts at determining where there is a lack of remorse for an action; but really, they don’t know why people act as they do and it is obvious from the recidivism rate that they don’t really have much of a track record concerning understanding the human heart.

Recall Paul’s situation. The Apostle was imprisoned. He was seized for the crime of preaching peace through the Prince of Peace. Religious people took umbrage at the message he brought. Seizing him, they would have slain him except that Roman guards intervened. When these soldiers were about to interrogate him through flogging, he explained that he held Roman citizenship. This began a series of hearings at which he continued to defend himself until at last there was no recourse save but to appeal to Caesar. Accordingly, the Apostle was delivered to Rome in chains where he was held in prison awaiting a hearing before Nero.

The religious leaders imagined that they had rid themselves of one who compelled them to think; they thought that he would no longer be disseminating what they considered a hurtful and hateful message. However, these paragons of pusillanimous piety could not have been more wrong. Here is the Apostle’s assessment of what happened as result of his incarceration. “I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear” **[PHILIPPIANS 1:12-14]**.

The situation was a prime example of Paul’s bold assertion when writing the Romans. “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” **[ROMANS 8:28]**. He continued with his survey of the religious landscape of the Faith, acknowledging that the motives of some who were preaching were less than sterling. “Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment” **[PHILIPPIANS 1:15-17]**.

Some people preached because they were emboldened by the Apostle’s fortitude and dedication. However, others were preaching who sought by their preaching to injure Paul. Mixed in among these two disparate groups were others that were motivated solely by the desire for personal advancement. Things haven’t changed that much in this day. There are people who draw courage from preachers who are bold and committed. Others hope to injure someone of whom they are jealous. Still others are just climbing the ecclesiastical ladder.

Paul weighs the situation and responds with this surprising assessment. “What does it matter? Just that in every way, whether out of false motives or true, Christ is proclaimed. And in that I rejoice” [**PHILIPPIANS 1:18**].<sup>2</sup> Today, the Apostle might say, “Some have been timid; they were reticent until I was jailed for the sake of the Gospel. Now they are preaching Christ, drawing courage from my willingness to stand firm in the truth. ‘Nothing matters except that, in one way or another, people are told the message about Christ, whether with honest or dishonest motives, and I’m happy about that.’”<sup>3</sup>

Of other situations, Paul might observe the efforts of individuals who dissented from his proclamation of Christ and now thought they could add to his injury through their own preaching. Of such foolish efforts, the Apostle would say, “I know that some people imagine that through preaching they will somehow injure me. ‘So how am I to respond? I’ve decided that I really don’t care about their motives, whether mixed, bad, or indifferent. Every time one of them opens his mouth, Christ is proclaimed, so I just cheer them on!’”<sup>4</sup>

Undoubtedly, today the Apostle might witness some who preach, noting that their preaching is aimed solely at obtaining a more prominent position for themselves. The Apostle might well say of such preachers, “It doesn’t matter. The important thing is that in every way, whether for right or wrong reasons, they are preaching about Christ. So I am happy, and I will continue to be happy.”<sup>5</sup>

Whether drawing inspiration and courage from his stand, or whether endeavouring to make his burden heavier, or whether to make themselves look good, Paul would say, “What is my feeling in view of these things? The only thing that follows is that in every manner, whether in presence or in truth, whether insincerely or sincerely, Christ is being proclaimed. And in this I am rejoicing, and I will certainly continue to rejoice.”<sup>6</sup>

For the Apostle, the most important thing was that Christ was preached. He would not care whether the preacher wore robes or a suit. He would not care whether the preacher wore cowboy boots or wingtips. He would be indifferent whether the preacher spoke with a southern drawl or spoke with a clipped Maritime brogue. He would consider it inconsequential and a matter of no concern whether the preacher was High Church or Low Church. He would not care whether the preacher shouted and hollered until he was red in the face or whether he spoke in hushed tones. He would think it a matter of no importance whether the preacher grew excited or whether he was subdued in the pulpit. Whether the preacher used multiple illustrations or confined himself strictly to the text would be of scant moment to the Apostle. What mattered to the Apostle was the Christ was preached.

I do not want to leave the illusion that doctrine is unimportant; it is vital. I do not want anyone to conclude that communication is optional; it is central and it is essential. I do want to stress that we are obligated to preach Christ crucified, buried and resurrected. We are responsible to declare the Son of God ascended into the glory where He is seated at the right hand of the Father. We must ensure that we remind people of the truth that hell is hot, eternity is long, salvation is free and Christ redeems sinners.

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<sup>2</sup> **The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version** (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2009) **PHILIPPIANS 1:18**

<sup>3</sup> **GOD’S WORD Translation** (Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, MI 1995) **PHILIPPIANS 1:18**

<sup>4</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2005) **PHILIPPIANS 1:18**

<sup>5</sup> **The Everyday Bible: New Century Version** (Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN 2001) **PHILIPPIANS 1:18**

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth S. Wuest, **The New Testament: An Expanded Translation** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1961) **PHILIPPIANS 1:18**

Really, what is in view is your understanding of your responsibility before the Master. You who believe, what is your purpose in life? Do you understand why God has left you here? Do you imagine that your happiness is God's highest purpose for your life? Do you not rather know that God left you here that you might glorify His Name? You and I are responsible to know His will and to do His will. When His Name is proclaimed and life is freely offered to all who will believe, each of us should rejoice because we are witnessing His power and His might.

**CHRIST WILL BE HONOURED** — “I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.”

What a powerful statement is presented in this portion of the Word! The Apostle testifies, “With full courage now as always Christ will be honoured in my body.” Paul is saying quite clearly that he has accepted the responsibility to present His life as a living sacrifice. Perhaps you will recall the apostolic charge that is incumbent upon each believer. The charge is found in **ROMANS 12:1, 2**. “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Let's unpack the charge. Are you a Christian? God has claim upon your life. Your body is His! He expects you to present your body for His glory. Let me emphasise that by referring you to several passages of the Word. Paul warned the Corinthians, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” [**1 CORINTHIANS 6:19, 20**].

When you were baptised, you made a vow. Though many churches have reduced baptism to a mere ritual, it is a pledge of commitment to Christ. After appealing to the significance of baptism for those who have believed, Paul pointedly addresses the Christians in Rome. “Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness” [**ROMANS 6:13**]. He follows this with another, similar affirmation when he writes, “Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness” [**ROMANS 6:16**]? He is not finished with this line of reasoning, for shortly he presents the identical argument. “Just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification” [**ROMANS 6:19**].

Nor should anyone imagine that Paul is alone is making such a contention. Peter has written, “As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” [**1 PETER 2:4, 5**].

Perhaps you wonder how a Christian implements this teaching. Paul deals with that precise issue in the Letter to Colossian Christians. He writes, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” [COLOSSIANS 3:5-10].

I recommend as a parallel passage to the one just cited the words that are found in **EPHESIANS 5:1-21**. “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

“But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“‘Awake, O sleeper,  
and arise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you.’

“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

How shall we summarise these instructions? One of the great tragedies of modern church life is that we have compiled such instructions, setting them to music. Then, we teach them to our children. However, as soon as we enter our teens, such songs are jettisoned and forgotten. As I read the passages concerning Christian behaviour, I recalled a delightful song we used to teach our children. Perhaps you learned it as well.

O be careful little ears what you hear.  
O be careful little ears what you hear.  
For the Father up above is looking down in love,  
So be careful little ears what you hear.

Those of you who know the song, know that it continues by admonishing,

O be careful little eyes what you see.  
O be careful little eyes what you see.  
For the Father up above is looking down in love,  
So be careful little eyes what you see.

The children singing the song learn that little hands must be careful what they do; little feet must be careful where they go; little mouths must be careful what they say; little minds must be careful what they think; and little hearts must be careful what they love. The song summarises in succinct fashion the truths that Paul has presented; and those truths are nothing less than a plea for us to honour the Lord Christ with our bodies.

Honour means that we who are honourable make every effort to follow hard after the Master. Honour means that we learn what pleases Him and do all possible to do those things. Honour means that we seek His will in all things. Honour means that we accept responsibility for our speech, endeavouring to build others rather than engaging in banalities, throwing a few platitudes about as though that summarised the Faith. It means that we consider what we feed our minds on, knowing that “out of the abundance of the heart [the] mouth speaks” [**LUKE 6:45**]. We forget that “What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person” [**MATTHEW 15:18-20**]. Honour means we accept responsibility to build one another and not merely take what we can from every relationship.

The Apostle was determined that Christ should be honoured in his body, whether by life or by death. I must die one day. Should Christ tarry, I must go the way of all flesh. I’ve often noted that the statistics on death are dramatic—one out of one dies. I cannot avoid this inevitable date. I cannot know the time of my death, nor even how I will be ushered out of this life and into the life to come. What I can do is ensure that I have not dishonoured Him who loved me and gave Himself for me. What I can ensure is that I have spoken the truth and lived to the praise of His glory. I can so determine to live that I honour Him through building others, through giving preference to those who share this most holy Faith, through investing myself in the lives of others as Christ has appointed me to do.

**CALL TO ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE** — “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”

Paul moves from expressing joy to pleading for an honourable life to the appeal for unity. It is an acknowledgement that unity is essential to an honourable life. Paul urges his readers to accept responsibility for the conduct of their own lives; he does not permit God’s people to excuse dishonourable behaviour by whinging that they can’t help themselves. Moreover, the implication of his words is that when the people of God accept responsibility for their own behaviour and determine to act honourably, they will experience unity. Paul’s concern was “that ... I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents.”

It often seems that the cry of the modern Christian is, “I can’t help myself.” Tragically, the pulpit often appears to abet such puerile efforts of excusing our sinful proclivities. Paul confronts such bleating, insisting that not only can the Christian help himself or herself, but demanding that the Christian choose what is honourable! In conducting one’s life in a manner that reflects the Gospel of Christ, the Apostle argues that we lay the foundation for unity in the assembly. Three benefits become apparent to the congregation that holds one another accountable and that strives toward acceptance of responsibility to be honourable: they will stand firm in one spirit; they will effectively advance the Gospel of Christ; and they will not be frightened by those who oppose righteousness.

As an aside of some significance, let me note that I am always amazed when I come to the Word to observe the repeated plea for unity found in the Bible. The reason for the constant refrain of the necessity of harmony is because the human heart seeks to promote its own interests and not the interest of others. Thus, it requires effort and constant monitoring to keep one’s heart in unity with the Spirit, and thus in harmony as an assembly. The evidence for this necessity is witnessed throughout the Word and in the daily life of the congregations of the Master.

Of the first congregation in Jerusalem, it was said that though they had one heart in many bodies. Of modern churches, it could be said that though there are many hearts in each member. When Paul expresses his longing for the Philippians to stand firm in one spirit, his plea is nothing less than an appeal for doctrinal harmony. I hear the argument raised by some Christians who do not wish to hear doctrinal preaching. May I say that without sound doctrine, no congregation can advance and the cause of Christ will shortly suffer, falling into a meaningless religious exercise. Doctor Luke describes the Jerusalem congregation following the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost in this manner, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” [ACTS 2:42]. Without the Apostles’ teaching (doctrine), there would be no fellowship and no worship. Foundational to any hope of these essential aspects of church life is doctrine.

Paul warns, “The Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons” [1 TIMOTHY 4:1]. Therefore, it is essential that the congregation expect—nay, demand—that the preacher devote himself “to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation [and] to teaching” [1 TIMOTHY 4:13]. The church that will advance as one will expect and demand sound doctrine from the pulpit, knowing that, “The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” [2 TIMOTHY 4:3].

I do not expect that we will agree in every detail of life—we are not plastic saints, we are not all stamped out with celestial cookie cutters. I do expect that we agree in essential doctrine. I accept the responsibility to declare the Word of God, teaching with all diligence the truths of God’s Word; and I expect that you who receive that Word will stand as one with me, supporting the teaching of the Word and insisting upon a vigorous defence of the Gospel from the pulpit.

The Apostle also speaks of another benefit arising from individual acceptance of responsibility to honour the Master—the congregation will work together to advance the Gospel. Paul speaks of the Philippians “striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.” The phrase, “the faith of the gospel,” could mean one of three things: “the faith that is the gospel,” “the faith that originates from the gospel” or “faith in the gospel” (objective genitive).<sup>7</sup> It is of small moment how you understand that phrase; what is vital is that you realise that every advancement comes as the people of God are united, working together for a common purpose.

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<sup>7</sup> The NET Bible First Edition (Biblical Studies Press, 2006)

I observe that the day of missionary advance may well be passing. The massive outward thrust of the churches of our Lord during the latter part of the Eighteenth Century and the early days of the Nineteenth Century appears to be dying out. The numbers volunteering for missionary advance are few, and their commitment is for a few months, rather than the investment of a lifetime. Perhaps this is the natural result of the exaltation of the self-life among the professed people of God, but I suspect that a major contributor to this condition is the emphasis from the pulpit upon the individual to the exclusion of the Body concept. Where the congregation understands that it is the Body of Christ and each member is responsible to contribute his or her gift for the benefit of others, reaching outward is the norm. Where the teaching permits the individual to focus on building himself or herself, the result is an inevitable atrophy of missionary impulse and a restriction of evangelistic zeal. If we each determine that we will honour the Master through obedience to His command and through building one another, we will again witness missionary advance and effective evangelism from this congregation.

I hasten to note this final benefit of accepting the responsibility to be honourable in our life and faith is that we will not be “frightened in anything by [our] opponents.” There are many who oppose the message of life. Opposition to righteousness grows exponentially in these last days. Tragically, much of the opposition comes from governments who imagine that they can legislate a new morality that supersedes the righteousness of God. What is especially unfortunate is that few voices among the churches are raised in opposition to these efforts. The pulpit frequently seems to applaud wickedness because the shepherds are untutored in the Word of God. Consequently, the flock is incapable of speaking the truth when error is promoted from civic officials.

Within the assemblies are many who oppose the truth. Paul spoke of such individuals who oppose the truth when writing Timothy. He warned, “Understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith” [2 TIMOTHY 3:1-8].

He named names of some among the churches who were denoted by their opposition to the Faith: Hymenaeus [1 TIMOTHY 1:20], Alexander [1 TIMOTHY 1:20; 2 TIMOTHY 4:14, 15] and Demas [2 TIMOTHY 4:10]. To Titus he would issue the warning, “There are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers” [TITUS 1:10]. Paul identified such people as “having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power” [2 TIMOTHY 3:5].

Nevertheless, when the people of God accept the responsibility to honour God with their lives, they will no longer fear those who oppose the Faith. The people of God will be marked by boldness much as the first believers were marked by boldness. Of course, such boldness does not just happen. You cannot be a bold saint until you are a saint. It is necessary that you receive the Master as ruler over your life. The Word declares, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Master,’ believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be set free. With the heart one believes and is made right with the Father, and with the mouth one confesses and is set free” [ROMANS 10:9, 10 - AUTHOR’S TRANSLATION].

The passage concludes by offering God's perfect freedom to all who will receive it. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" [**ROMANS 10:13**]. May God instruct each of us, calling us into the life of His Son and teaching us how to live honourably. Amen.