



Dr. Robert A. Cook

Look, You're Transparent

What people find out
when they really get to
know you



“Look, You’re Transparent”

By Dr. Robert A. Cook



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Preface

“Ah,” my Latin friend would say to me with a twinkle in his eye, “I possess your numero!” Which is another way of saying, “I’ve got your number, I size you up well.”

Ultimately the people we live with, the ones we work with, even those with whom we casually rub shoulders are going to know quite accurately the kind of person we are. The sad stubborn fact is that people can see right through us. We “cover our tracks” only lightly.

Billy Graham tells the story of a small boy (I suspect it might have been himself) who was warned by his father not to get into the family watermelon patch because, the father said, the melons were not yet ripe.

But one day when the father drove into town the boy could not resist the urge to show his superior knowledge of growing things. He found a melon exactly “right” for eating. Taking it to the back pasture he broke it open and buried his face in its cool heart. (It was almost sweet.)

The remains he hid in sandy soil beside the creek, covered carefully with leaves.

A few weeks later the father looked everywhere for a lost cow. His search took him to the back pasture. And there, of all things, were the first shoots of a watermelon patch! What happened next needs no explanation. We might say that this story could apply to the fact that God sees hidden things in a person’s life. He does. But people see them too.

I’m no advocate for wholesale exhibitionism, so to speak, in religious matters. There are some things that one may very well carry with him, unshared, to the grave. I don’t think it helps people—either you or your hearers—to drag out matters that ought to remain covered by the grace of God. What I am saying is that our contacts with people show us up to them. We are, as they see us, generous or selfish, humble or proud, honest or hedging. Paul recognized this transparency.

You Know Me

Paul (in 2 Timothy 3:10-15), addressing his “son” in the gospel, enumerated some of the things he knew Timothy could perceive in him.

“Thou hast fully known [me] my doctrine [teaching] manner of life purpose longsuffering., charity [Calvary love] patience. persecutions, afflictions ”

What persecutions and afflictions? They “came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra: what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me.” (And Paul added, “All that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” - remember that, Timothy, not just you, not just me, but all.)

Then, Paul says, there will be others to encounter, “evil men and seducers (imposters) who shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.”
What is Timothy to do?

“Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them. And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

Thus Paul spells out for Timothy-and for us-the blessed, God-given antidote for human-nature faults on the one hand and apostasy and rejection on the other.

And he says, in effect, “As you face these testing experiences, Timothy, people will see through you. They will know whether you are genuine or not.”

My Doctrine Shows

“Thou hast fully known my doctrine.” “Doctrine” is our word teaching. You have to know what you believe before you can live it. And “know” here means you’ve gotten hold of truth independently, for yourself.

We have what we call the Second Generation Problem. Young people come to the college, or other schools, without a clear understanding of what they believe. To be sure, Mom and Dad are dear, dedicated Christians. They established a Christian home, and the son or daughter coasted along, presumably on the parents’ religion. Then, by the young person’s going away to school, the familiar props are removed. He suddenly sees that he must get hold of truth for himself -

or he has nothing. Sometimes this realization is a great shock to him.

Paul says in effect, "Timothy, you 'know'; you have gotten hold of truth for yourself, independent of others. Good!"

What is the teaching (doctrine) in view here?

Teaching concerns the Word of God. The Christian position on the Bible is that it is inspired, that it was without error as God gave it in the original documents. The sixty-six books that comprise our Bible are substantially-I use that word carefully - the same as when our Lord gave them to those who wrote them in the first place.

The Bible agrees with itself. It is one unit. This could not possibly be true if it were not a miracle Book, for it was written over hundreds of years, by many authors, in different cultures, at various times, and from many points of view. In spite of this diversity *"All scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable for doctrine (teaching)."* See 2 Timothy 3:16. If you don't believe in an infallible Bible, of what good is it?

Six or eight years after I had used certain science textbooks in high school the idea struck me that I might sell these books to a second hand dealer and get a few dollars for them.

The hoped - for buyer laughed at me. "These are out of date," he said, "we don't believe this stuff any more."

No, you wouldn't teach science from an outdated textbook, would you? Likewise if you don't believe the Bible is infallible, a Book that is as up to date in its teaching about the cosmos as it is about spiritual matters -well, friend, what's the use of teaching at all?

At the college we believe in the infallible, inerrant, inspired Word of God, the Bible. Every scientist has the right to one presupposition; that's ours. Every time I have brought that up to a skeptical examiner who has come to look us over, he has had to agree: You have a right, academically, to your basic presuppositions as long as you keep consistent to them.

Teaching has to do with God's revealed purpose for this world. That takes in the sinfulness of man the holiness and love of God the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus Christ the blessed presence of the Holy Spirit.

Teaching relates to the character of the church. It is the Body of Christ-with Christ Himself its

living Head. Though its members may be separated from each other by miles and denominational differences, they are one living organism.

Teaching relates to the desire of a gracious God for the evangelization of the world, leading to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is "not willing that any should perish." Surely everybody in the world deserves the right to hear the gospel once before others hear it more than once.

Teaching relates to conduct. We are to live separate from the world system. "*Know ye not,*" Paul says, "*that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's*" (1 Cor. 6: 19, 20).

There you have a quick over - view of some of the things that are important: the Word of God the Son of God the Gospel of God the Church of God the will of God the purpose of God the glory of God.

This, then is a wrap-up of Christian doctrine. It is something you and I need to know. Do you really know what you believe? Do you have a good working knowledge of the Word of God?

I would recommend to you a classic in its field, a book by the late great Dr. R.A. Torrey entitled "What the Bible Teaches". If you are near one of the Bible Institutes or Bible Colleges that teach the Word, where you could take courses, do that. Consider a Bible correspondence course. In any case and by any means, it is very important that you and I know what the Bible teaches - that is, doctrine. The person who bases his religion only on his feelings has an up - and down experience, because feelings vary with the weather. Study the Bible, and your faith will stand firm, whatever happens.

*I need no other confidence I have no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died And that He died for me.*

Know that. Your doctrine will be translated into daily living.

My Manner of Life Shows

"Thou hast fully known ... my manner of life." What you believe results in how you behave. For illustration, consider this hypothetical case.

Here's a man who has been caught breaking and entering-caught red-handed.

He's brought to the police station and booked for attempted burglary. In due process his hearing is held. You think you know some mitigating circumstances and so you go to bat for him. As a result he's given parole. While he was in jail he was thoroughly repentant. But he's out now. You watch him, hopefully. To your surprise, in no time at all he's back at his old trade.

You say to him, "I thought you were through with all that." He has a hundred alibis. The fact is, however, he still believes, down deep in his heart, that stealing is the easiest way for him to get his hands on some money—and so he breaks into people's houses and takes it. Not that he hasn't been told, both by the judge and by you and a lot of other people that what he did was wrong. The fact remains: His belief has not changed, so his way of living is unaltered.

Motivation is Important

Take another illustration. Here's this fellow who has been told that he has a stomach ulcer and that he therefore should stay away from highly spiced or fatty or acid or very fibrous foods. Well, he goes to dinner at Mrs. John Q. Citizen's house. She has some wonderful food, including watermelon pickles of which he is very fond. When passed his way, he takes a generous helping of pickles and of other things—two pieces of pie, the whole bit. He wakes up in the middle of the night with a terrible pain and calls the doctor.

"Now if this happens again," the medic tells him, "we're going to have to perform a gastric resection and take out maybe two-thirds of your stomach." (He might have added, "and all of your wallet.")

Something clicks in the man's mind and he thinks to himself, "Hey, what I did resulted in how I felt. I'd better watch that."

Thus he begins to believe what he didn't believe before. Now when he goes out to dinner and someone serves delicacies like watermelon pickles, he firmly passes them by and says, "No thank you." Has he stopped liking watermelon pickles? No, he now believes what the doctor told him.

Belief Profoundly Affects Behavior

If you believe the will of God is good and acceptable and perfect, then you will be found doing the will of God. Paul did. He could say to Timothy, "You've fully known my manner of life." Oh, yes. The way we live tells other people exactly what we believe.

If you see a person who spends a lot on himself and little on his church, although he may

sing loudly:

All to Jesus I surrender, I surrender all, you know he doesn't believe what he says.

Here's a young man who professes to be a dedicated Christian, but he consistently runs with people of the world. He dates godless girls and his best friends are among those who have no time for God. He may say he's a Christian. He may get very "righteous" if you question him about it. But what he really believes is that the best crowd to go with is his crowd. His belief shows clearly in his manner of life.

I was talking years ago to a young person who had committed a felony-just gently probing to see how he felt about things.

He said, "Well, I know I'm in trouble.

But I want you to know I'm a born- again believer, and I'm as good a Christian as anybody else." Bless his heart, maybe he was, and maybe he is, but at that point his life style was giving the lie to his profession, wasn't it?

Value of Consistency

Parents sometimes come to me in great sadness. They say,. "Where did we fail? We were faithful in the church. We brought our children to Sunday School and saw to it that they were taught the Word of God. We tried to give them Christian upbringing in the home. Now they've turned against us and against the Lord. What went wrong?"

I have to say first of all that it's not always a matter of parental failure when a child turns against the Lord. Christ Himself told the story of the prodigal son, and the fact that the younger son took his journey into a far country and wasted his substance in riotous living certainly could not be ascribed to any misconduct on the part of that loving father.

But having said that, I must go on to point out that children particularly-although their observations are not well organized-are amazingly acute and perceptive. When they see that religion is simply a veneer, when they see that it is something that can be put on on Sunday and chucked off for the rest of the week, they reject it. It's a frightening thought, isn't it? May it not be true that many a brokenhearted parent could find the answer to his present distress in the manner of life he has shown to his children over the years?

My Purpose Shows

"Thou hast fully known ... my purpose."

The way you live grows out of the kind of purpose you have.

It's hard for me to tell somebody else what he or she should be living for. We all know that the purpose of the Christian is to glorify God, to be in His will, to do those things that He planned for us from and to eternity.

Paul put the matter in a beautiful way in Philippians 1 :20:

"According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be MAGNIFIED in my body, whether it be by life, or by death."

"Magnify" means to show up bigger and bigger. The desire of every born-again believer should be that the Lord Jesus Christ should be magnified - to entirely fill the frame of our lives - so that people will see Him when they observe you and me.

Do you know how this is to be accomplished in your own life?

First, your life must be given to Him, so that He can live in and through you.

"I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice ... unto God" (Rom. 12:1).

Second, your loyalty and your standards must be His rather than the world's.

"Be not conformed to this world [that means don't be jammed into the world's matrix or mold] but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2).

That word "transformed" is our word metamorphosis. We know it as descriptive of what happens to a caterpillar when it becomes a butterfly. Where once there were fifty legs, now there are six. Fuzz has changed to wings and little whiskers have become beautifully colored microscopic scales on those wings. First there was the eating of leaves, now there is the tasting of nectar. A transformation has taken place!

Likewise the purpose of the Christian-to magnify the Lord Jesus involves newness of life. Christlikeness is visible in a person in direct proportion to God's working of a miracle in that life. Third, your desires must be wholly absorbed by His desires. Let His will be the determining factor in every decision you make.

If you will do this, people will recognize His trademarks in your life (though they may never

speak of this). When Christ's will is being done and Christ's work is being accomplished and Christ's power is being manifested, people will be able to say, as the psalmist did, "This is the Lord's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes."

On some pieces of fine machinery and sporting equipment frequently you will find certain identification. For instance, if you buy an expensive shotgun and you look along the trigger guard you will find a tiny mark which is the personal trademark of the man who constructed that piece of equipment. It shows that the piece was handmade, carefully made, and that the manufacturer's stamp is on it.

What we want is the mark of God upon us. That's what the Psalmist prayed, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us."

For what purpose? So that Jesus can show up larger and larger in all that we say and do. It is imperative that you and I line up our lives with the purpose of God in Christ. There are a number of verses that refer to this relationship.

For example, look at Ephesians 3:8-11:

"Unto me," [Paul said] is given this grace ... that I should preach ... the unsearchable riches of Christ ... to the intent that now, unto principalities and powers ... might be known by the church, the manifold wisdom of God, according to THE ETERNAL PURPOSE, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him."

Could you say that your reason for living lines up with God's will? There is a phrase that's currently used, "getting it all together." Romans 8:28 says something like that: "We know that all things work together for good, to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

When you are in the will of God and you know it-whatever occurs is not just happenstance, not accidental, not coincidental even. What takes place in your life and mine when we're in line with the purpose of God? We are made a part of God's eternal plans. We are brought into agreement with His all-encompassing holy will! Staggering thought, isn't it? Life for us "gets together." It doesn't fall apart, nor do we fall apart in it. There is a cohesiveness in living one's life in Christ that is a continual delight.

Look back over your life as I look back over mine. Can you see how He moved us from one place to another, from one environment to another, from one kind of work to another, from one challenge to a greater one? Every experience was necessary to and good for the one it joined, wasn't it? Praise God for that.

You Purpose - God Works

“Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself” with the rich food and wine that Nebuchadnezzar the conqueror ordered for a select group of his captives. When Daniel declared his position, immediately he had support from his peers, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. They were in the ten-day test together. As one man, they came out with flying colors.

What happens when you make God’s will your will?

When you obey God you’ll find other people standing with you perhaps not many, but some. Look for them. Thank God for them.

You may have to pay a price for obeying God. There’s an element of risk. It might just as well have been that Daniel’s head, and those of his companions, would be cut off for suggesting disobedience to the king’s command. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews speaks of glorious deliverances “by faith.” But it calls attention also to some who “were stoned ... were sawn asunder ... were slain with the sword ... destitute, afflicted, tormented (of whom the world was not worthy).”

It says “these all ... obtained a good report through faith.” Obeying

God involves willingness to do what He says, whatever happens.

When you do God’s will you’re assured ultimate victory. When the ten-day test that Daniel and his friends requested was over, *“their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king’s meat” (Dan. 1:15)*. The blessings of that purposing extended through three dynasties. Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.

This whole matter of an overriding purpose begins in the heart, with a sincere desire to live a holy life. Let me remind you that the world is full of people who are quite willing to talk religion but who back off when it involves their life style.

A Question of Wanting

Many years ago I talked with a lady in a prayer room where she was kneeling after an evening service at which I had given a gospel invitation.

She said, “My husband warned me that if I ever became a Christian he’d leave me.

I can't stand that thought"

Whereupon she got up off her knees, put on her mink stole, went out and turned the key in her new Cadillac and drove off-unsaved. I haven't seen her from that day to this.

Do you really want God's will? I think we have to be honest here. There have been many times in my life when I haven't wanted to do God's will; I wanted my own way. Well, then, what do I do about such a condition? Do I just go ahead and disobey? Oh, no. I pray, and by faith I commit my will to God, bringing every thought, as Paul says, "into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

If you are a child of God you took the Lord Jesus as Savior by faith, didn't you? Now how do you deal with any given need in your life? You take by faith His lordship, His mastery of that area. You give your unwillingness to Jesus by faith, and you take by faith His control of your motives. He makes the difference, the change in attitude and desire.

A cousin of mine, a high school principal, told me about a boy in his school who was a chronic swearer. But somehow he got in touch with the Lord Jesus Christ and his life began to change.

One day he injured himself in going over the high hurdles on the track. My cousin heard this story afterwards from the coach.

The coach said, "I went over to him where he was sitting on the ground hugging that injured knee and murmuring something to himself. The most I could hear was the phrase, "Don't let me do it! Don't let me do it!"

I said, "George, who are you talking to?"

"You wouldn't understand." He went on repeating, "Don't let me do it."

"Who are you talking to?" "To Jesus."

"Don't let you do what?"

"Don't let me dishonor You, Jesus, by cursing and swearing."

He had learned the secret: Motives and actions are the natural outgrowth of desire-desire for the will of God. We take His control by faith.

My Faith Shows

"Thou hast fully known ... my faith." Faith is an observable phenomenon.

A good many years ago Youth for Christ was planning a huge open air rally to be held on

Memorial Day in Chicago's Soldiers Field. Weather, as you know, in the upper mid-west states can be a bit capricious. In terms of advertising, rentals, guarantees, radio outlay, etc., we had a good deal at stake for we attempted to saturate not only the greater Chicago area but also to reach out as far as Fort Wayne and Milwaukee.

Atone of the pre-planning sessions somebody cautioned, "Don't you think that because we have so much invested here we ought to have insurance against rain damage, so that if there is a storm that day we'll be covered?"

One person in the group-not a minister but a businessman-came up with a quick answer. His faith was observable. He said, "We believe God led us to do this planning, don't we? We are sure God led us up to this point, aren't we?" There was general, if unenthusiastic, assent. "Well, then," our friend went on, "that being the case I think it would be gross unbelief on our part not to expect God to give us all this project requires-including good weather."

There was no more mention of rain insurance. Incidentally, that Memorial Day it rained everywhere around Chicago for a distance of some fifty miles. But in Chicago the skies were blue! Hallelujah!

Is your faith observable, or is it something you keep well hidden? Some people mask their unbelief under the pious supposition that faith is such a private thing that they can't talk about it. I've noticed that people talk about matters that they're delighted about and that are important to them. The reason some people don't talk about faith is that they don't have any! Paul said, "You have fully known ... my faith."

Trusting-and Cooperating

Faith is the ability to risk the situation on God, while doing everything that He tells you to do. Take, for illustration, Christ's feeding of the five thousand, as recorded in John 6. Jesus asked the question, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these [a great multitude, verse 1] may eat?" Philip replied in effect, "Why, Master, we'd have to go into debt for a whole year in order to give everyone just an hors d'oeuvre - and you know how mad a hungry man can get if he is served only a small bit!"

Jesus pressed the question: "What do you have?"

Andrew replied that they had only a boy's lunch-five black pancakes and two sardines. Jesus directed that the people be seated in companies of 50's and 100's (Mark 6:39).

He distributed the food to the disciples and they in turn gave to the multitude, and they gathered basketsful of fragments left over. Jesus performed a miracle—because He is God. Those portions of bread and fish did not magically float from His hands to the hands of other people. There were human beings whom God utilized in the process of performing this miracle.

He uses people to do His will.

If you're interested in God's working through you in faith, make up your mind concerning two great realities: God is big enough to do anything. (You can safely risk all on Him.) And your obedience is a part of His working.

Remember the incident recorded in John 9 about the man born blind. The Lord Jesus put some hand warmed clay on the man's eyelids and told him to wash it off in the pool of Siloam. Could our Lord Jesus have healed the man without "means"? Of course He could! He did on other occasions give sight to blind people using only His word of power.

But here he wanted this man to be involved in obedience so that he-and we-could know the relation of obedience to faith and to a glorious outcome. When the man obeyed, he came back-seeing. What is God asking you to do? Believe Him. Risk the situation on Him. Obey Him. And you, too, will "see."

Focus on a Person

Faith is focused not on the trial or the testing, not on the experience or the circumstances, not on the job itself; it is focused on a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. Once you learn this lesson you will never be on the anxious seat about things that "happen." That's the thrust of the old song:

*Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees
And looks to God alone; Laughs at impossibilities
And cries, "It shall be done!"*

Try this the next time you are under pressure and tend to worry. Look up and say, "Dear Lord, I'm Yours. I'm trusting You in this situation. Show me what You want me to do. Teach me what You want me to learn."

You will be surprised at two results.

The peace of God will fill your heart. Instead of fretting you'll be resting. You will also experience the joy of letting God work through your life, as you let Him.

There is a verse in Isaiah (26:3) that points up this truth: *“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.”* The mind stayed on God is never a closed mind. The Bible nowhere teaches evasion of reality. We are to face facts squarely and honestly. But we are to face them with confidence that God is in charge.

This focusing of our faith on the Lord Jesus Christ will issue in our praying-not in generalities merely, but for specific objects.

We often quote the verse, *“All things are possible to him that believeth”* (Mk. 9:23). Those words were spoken in the midst of great travail and heartbreak on the part of a father whose son was ill. He had taken his boy first to the disciples, but they could do nothing for him. Now he pleads with the Savior, *“If thou canst do anything, have mercy on us and help us.”*

The Lord Jesus turned the phrase right back to the father and said, *“If thou canst”* - that is, *“If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.”*

Here was a specific need. The father brought it to our Lord Jesus Christ. And when his own heart began to believe God, the miracle took place. It is very easy to blame our troubles on other people when they actually originate in ourselves. *“Canst thou believe?”*

Simon Peter had the glorious experience of walking on the water at Jesus' command. But on that stormy Sea of Galilee, the moment his eyes strayed from the Saviour, down he went! As soon as he saw the wind and the waves boisterous, he became afraid and started to sink. It is always that way. But if I focus on the Lord Jesus-the Victor, the One who is always expressing the perfect will of God to me and through me-I'm on my way to victory.

Pray for specifics: If you need the mortgage paid for, don't just say, *“Lord, help us.”* Pray in faith that God will lift the mortgage.

Other People Involved

Focused faith will also involve people. Mark 2 tells of four men who brought a sick man, their buddy, to the Lord Jesus. When they got to the house where Jesus was, they found the crowd so great that they couldn't get in, so they went to a back stairway, climbed up on the flat roof, took off the covering tiles, and let the man down through the hole they had made. The record states, *“When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee”* (Mk. 2:5). A moment later He said, *“Arise, take up thy pallet and walk.”* He forgave him and healed him, in that order-all in response, mind you, to the faith of four people who believed He could do it.

Have you exercised faith for some one recently-some one outside the circle of your own family and close acquaintances? Have you seen a person in real need, and then prayed in faith about that need, and received by faith an answer from the Lord?

Yes, faith is an observable phenomenon. It is the ability to risk any given situation to God, while doing what He tells you to do. It is focusing one's attention-steadily, constantly - on the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, unafraid of conditions that surround us.

My LongSuffering Shows

"Thou hast fully known ... my long-suffering." In effect, Paul was adding to what Timothy already knew about him. Paul implied: "You have found out about me. You have my number. You know what I taught (my doctrine), you know the way I lived (manner of life), you know the purpose that drives me and keeps me in touch with the power of God. Now, Timothy, you know of my long-suffering, too."

In the Greek the word is makrothumia ... large-heartedness.

Long-suffering is a quality of God Himself. *'The Lord is merciful and gracious [long-suffering], slow to anger and plenteous in mercy' (Psa. 103:8). "The long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah ... " (1 Pet. 3:20). "The Lord is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish" (2 Pet. 3:9). We are not surprised that the Apostle Paul states in Galatians 5 that the "fruit of the Spirit" is manifested in "love ... joy ... peace ... long-suffering:'*

When we talk of a big-hearted person we think of one who is generous, outgoing, compassionate - one who cares, and cares enough to act. All of these concepts are involved in Paul's use of the word. He points out that this largeness of heart (that only God can create in and for His child) will have far-reaching beneficial results.

Long-suffering affects me personally. The capacity of my heart for God, and my capacity for caring about other people, are directly related to the authority I give to the Word of God in my life. Here is the secret *"I will run in the way of thy commandments when [or then] thou shalt enlarge my heart" (Psa. 119:32).*

Long-suffering and patience are so closely entwined that it is impossible to speak of one apart from the other. We have to admit quite frankly that all of us are normally, naturally, impatient. For the most part, your average variety human wants things to move. Isn't that true?

Help Needed!

Sometimes we tend to defend our impatient ways. I remember a soprano who, many years ago, threw a tantrum in my office. When she had time to think of how she had acted she came back, a little ashamed of herself.

“Well” she said, “I blow my top but then I get over it”

I tried to explain to her-gently, I hope-that one can indeed express his or her violent feelings and recover from the experience, but other people who are a part of that experience may not. Scar tissue may be left on their hearts that often never heals.

We must realize that we can't help ourselves, beyond a certain point. Self-discipline is good and we ought to practice it. But we may very well take a lesson from the psalmist (Psa. 39:1-5) who wrote:

“I said, I will take heed to my mouth that I sin not with my lips ... (But) while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my mouth, Lord, make me to know the measure of my days ... how frail I am ... Verily, every man at his BEST state is altogether vanity.”

That's what the psalmist said even after he made up his mind to exercise self-discipline in the matter of his wayward speech. Like him, I must have someone to apply the life changing truth of the Word of God to my life. That Someone is the blessed Holy Spirit.

In Romans 5:5 Paul states that the “love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us:’ Here is divine compulsion; the love of God drove him along. Face up to the fact no one of us can become large-hearted, in the scriptural sense, by his own efforts, try as hard as we may.

Newness Needed

I must be ready to change. The secret is spelled out in 2 Corinthians 3:18 where the keyword is “changed.”

We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

What that verse is saying is that if you get into the Word of God and let it get into you, a change will take place and it will be a change heavenward. You'll get to be more like the Lord

Jesus Christ. The One who accomplishes this continuing transformation, Paul says, is the Holy Spirit.

I need to be changed.

Projecting Christlikeness

The person that I really am will show up under pressure. Give me enough stress, that is, make me either tired enough or upset enough or angry enough or discouraged enough to damage my religious facade, and I will revert to the person I really am. It is very easy to mistake our professional appearances, so to speak, for the real life within. But people around us are not fooled one bit!

They watch to see how we react when the washer fails or the clothesline snaps. They look at us closely when they know something breaks our heart. They want to know how Christian faith relates to a hospital experience ... to an accident ... to a son's or daughter's brush with the law. Perhaps a corporate merger has squeezed you out of a job after you have worked for the company for say forty years. People want to know how you "take" that ultimatum.

With a combination of bitterness and panic you may be saying to yourself, "I gave that firm the best years of my life. Now look at me. What am I going to do? Nobody wants a man my age." Dear fellow believer, look to God to "change" you at this point, to give you divine calmness and assurance "that the world cannot give." Remember, your peers are keenly scrutinizing you to see if you have what it takes to come out victorious.

We ought to specialize in other people's needs rather than our own. Try this yourself sometime: Spend one whole day seeking to help other people in every way you can, forgetting yourself in the process. I can guarantee that at the end of the day you may be weary, but you will also be very, very happy. You will have learned a great deal about long-suffering.

Paul tells us that there is another important aspect of this subject.

Long-suffering has a strengthening effect.

God's goal for me is not that I should just grin and bear my troubles, but that I should be strengthened in order to experience these things with God's power and God's joy. That's a tremendous concept, isn't it?

Paul wrote to the church at Colosse (Col. 1:9-11):

(1) "do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his (God's) will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; STRENGTHENED with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness."

When Paul says "strengthened," he uses the word *duname* which is related to the noun *dunamis* from which we get our English word dynamite.

"With all might"-that's the Greek word which means literally a bulldozer-kind of strength that nothing can withstand. Did you ever see one of those big earth-moving machines that can lift say thirty cubit yards of earth at a time and carry it along at fifteen to twenty miles an hour? They can actually chew up a mountain in less time than it takes to write a book about it.

What God wants to do is to so work in my life that His power will be shown, not in my thrashing around and throwing my weight here or there so to speak, but in keeping me from blowing up, or giving up, or caving in, or exploding, or whatever. The purpose of God in strengthening me is that I might be patient, and the purpose of God's power is that I might have long-suffering-with joyfulness.

Long-suffering is a divine leverage by which God works.

This whole matter of long-suffering turns out to be God's blessed leverage to move other people closer to Jesus. The next time you are under pressure, think of it this way: God will use your long-suffering, your largeheartedness - not simply to make you able to "take it;" but also that by this very means someone else will be drawn closer to our blessed Lord. Great truth, isn't it?

This thought is borne out in 2 Corinthians 6:4-10, where some of the ways of implementing our religious beliefs are listed. Note that each one is preceded by the little word "by";
By pureness .. , A person whose life is not holy can't be much of a blessing to others.
By knowledge ... A person who is deliberately ignorant of God's Word and conditions around him can't help others very much.

By long-suffering ... The one whom God has made large-hearted is the one who has a ministry to his peers. It is not simply that I am to be a certain kind of person and have a certain kind of re-action to life. That's true, I am to be long-suffering-that large-heartedness, that

willingness to take ... and take ... and take without giving in or blowing up-in order to bring others closer to the Savior. (Read the whole passage.)

All right. I admit I have a ministry to others. What is the atmosphere in which this ministry must flourish? The first verses of 2 Corinthians 6 spell it out: "afflictions ... necessities ... distresses ..." Do you have any of these?

Remember, our job is to give God to people-not to win arguments, not even to show ourselves as being good Christians, not merely to enjoy a sense of well-being and satisfaction, all of which may come. But they are by-products. Our main business is to minister to people, and we often do this best through our own deep hurts, when they are yielded to God.

Is this clear to you? Long-suffering comes through God's Word. It comes through His Holy Spirit. It comes through His touch upon your life. It comes-oh, yes, it does!-as a result of testings

He sends.

Don't fight them. Glory in them. Let God use them-in your own life and in the lives of others.

My Charity (Calvary Love) Shows

"Thou hast fully known my ... charity (Calvary love). Paul had already mentioned to Timothy several things that Timothy was aware of:

Paul's teaching, his manner of life, his purpose, his long-suffering. Now, in effect, he says, "Timothy, you know also the special kind of love I have for you and for others; it is the love of God; it cannot be counterfeited."

In the King James Version of the Bible (1 Cor. 13: 1). the word is charity-our word for love. And it is a special kind of love that is in view here.

In the Greek language three words are translated "love": eros, which is sexual love; philadelphia, which is brotherly love, and agape, which is divine love, the kind expressed in John 3:16. When you get to know a person you find out quite accurately what kind of love (if any) he has and shares. Does he have anything more than the human capacity to be nice to other people who are nice to him or to whom he belongs in some familiar relationship? That person knows little or nothing about agape love.

Agape love starts with God. That's where you begin, not with yourself. Look at the kind of love God has: He "commended his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The proof and the depth of God's love is the death of Christ on Calvary for a world of

unconverted sinners. He proved His love by coming down the stairways of the stars, being born of Mary's virgin womb, living a sinless life, dying a perfect and atoning death on Calvary's cross and then rising, to be our living Savior.

You say, "I wish I had more love." Well, come to Christ. When you do, the love of God is shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost who is given unto us.

In the fifth chapter of Galatians (v. 22), where Paul is speaking of the fruit of the Spirit, he puts love first.

"The fruit of the Spirit is LOVE, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control."

Someone has said that in this Galatians passage every subsequent word is the result of love in a special sense.

Love begets joy.

Joy is love rejoicing.

Peace is love resting. Long-suffering is love opening its heart to people.

Gentleness is love refusing to be unkind.

Goodness is love seeking the righteousness of God.

Faith is love trusting the almightiness of God.

Meekness is love bowing low enough to realize from what it has been saved.

Temperance, or self-control, is love turning over the reins of life to God.

This is agape love in action. We ought to pray that God will give us more of it.

You say, "But I don't feel loving toward So-and-so." Years ago I learned from Bill Bright of Campus Crusade the great truth that I may take love by faith - even for that person whom I naturally resent - in the same way that I take salvation by faith.

Agape love is the identifying marks of the Christian. It is the quality that sets him apart from others, that gives him distinctiveness.

Years ago, when I was five, or six, or seven years old, I lived in Cleveland, Ohio, with my father and my sister, our mother having gone on to Glory when I was a baby. At that time my father was sort of a caretaker at the Spencerian Commercial School and we lived in an apartment in the basement of the school. After class hours I was free to roam the building.

I used to like to station myself in front of a big plate glass window that looked out on busy Euclid Avenue where I could watch the cars rush by. I soon learned the names of the cars I saw,

and after a while you couldn't stump me. All the old makes are gone now (and the mention of them dates me!): the Stutz, the Templar, the Mercer, the Pierce Arrow. There used to be a Chandler Chummy that was a kind of two-door, four-passenger affair, and you got in the front and then climbed through the middle of the front seat to get into the back seat.

Because I was so young, people often were surprised at my knowledge of these names. "Oh," I would say, "I just look for the things that are different about each one." A Rolls Royce has that special radiator ornament. Another car has a unique fender. And so on.

Of course, this skill in identifying cars is not restricted to a past generation. Fellows, and girls, make use of it today. The principle holds: It is the difference that characterizes.

Has it occurred to you that Jesus gave the one identifying mark by which you are to be known as belonging to Him? It's not your strictness, and it's not your aloofness, and it's not your theology neatly lined up in rows on the shelf of your soul. All of these things may be important, and of course they are. But Jesus said that if you want the heathen-anybody-to know that you belong to Him, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one for another" -real Calvary love. It is that kind of love that sent the Lord Jesus to die for you.

"Having loved his own ... he loved them unto the end," John 13:1 says.

Agape love-you simply can't fake it, because the Holy Spirit is the only One who can produce it, and when He does people will sense immediately the warmth of the divine presence. They'll feel safe with you. They'll be glad that you're around. And most of all they'll know - oh, yes, they'll know-that you belong to Jesus.

Agape love must be experienced personally. Paul says the love of Christ is something "which passeth knowledge" and yet it can be known-in fact it must be known by each of us who claims to be Christ's follower.

As part of his prayer for the Ephesians (3:19) the apostle asked that they might "*know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge [and] ... might be filled with all the fullness of God.*" That word know refers, not to intellectual enlightenment but to personal experience. The difference between these two kinds of knowing came to me sharply over twenty - five years ago.

I have always loved cars ... motorcycles ... airplanes ... anything mechanical. At this particular time in my life I was reading avidly the current aviation magazines. I knew about different kinds of aircraft, what they looked like, their unique characteristics, their potentials, at what speed they might stall out, and so on.

More than Book Learning

I was riding with a fellow member of Youth for Christ in his Beechcraft Bonanza over Cuba to Jamaica and some of the other islands where we had a string of meetings. Well, it was great and I enjoyed every minute of it. Finally I got my courage up enough to say, "Paul, you're a flight instructor and this ship has dual controls. How about giving me some instruction and letting me fly?"

"All right," he said, "let's do that." He began by telling me that the thing most beginners do wrong is that they over-control. (In all my reading of aviation magazines, this problem had never impressed me.)

"Put just your thumb and forefinger on the control wheel there," he said, "and move them ever so slightly until you get the feel of the airplane."

I began to realize that a very slight movement on the control wheel would cause a considerable reaction on the part of the aircraft as it was making its way through the sky.

The tremendous import of what was happening swept over me. I was not merely reading about flying. I was experiencing-personally, vividly the awesomeness, the thrill, the responsibility of moving this flying machine. And you know what happened? I began to break out in perspiration because of the intensity of the effort to follow my teacher's instructions to not over-control, to keep the aircraft straight and level, moving on its assigned course.

What is the point here? Agape love is much more than a doctrine to be studied. It is a personal thing-warming, moving, challenging, life" changing.

You can never do enough homework to understand the love of God. The Queen of Sheba came to see Solomon. After she had viewed the glories of his kingdom she said something like this, "I thought I knew a lot about you before I came here. But I have to tell you the half wasn't told me."

And that's the way it is with God's love. You can read about it. You can study it. You can talk about it. You can even pray about it. But until the Holy Spirit floods your soul with God's love, you really won't know too much about it. But you may know, and I pray God that you will.

One thing more:

Agape love can grow. Speaking of this love, Paul uses the word “abound” in Philippians 1 :9-11 :

“That your love may ABOUND more and more ... [you] being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ.”

Those of you who have been happily married for any considerable length of time will confirm what I’m about to say: As you have shared these years, and life has been good to you, you have grown to understand each other. It has been a blessed and a growing process. “Abound” means to spill over.

Suppose you had a cup filled with clear water and you were walking, let us say, from the kitchen to the dining room when somebody accidentally jostled you. What would spill out? Nothing but pure water. Nothing else could spill out, under those circumstances. If indeed, however, you had something else-let us say some brown gravy in that cup, and you were jostled, then what would happen? The brown gravy would spill over and stain your clothing and the rug and all the rest.

Now I am not comparing the love of God to either pure water or brown gravy, don’t mistake me. But I am saying that what is filling your life is what is going to overflow when you’re bumped by the testing of life. Dear friend, you can have a life full of God’s love-agape love, that is, Calvary love, John 3: 16 love by trusting Jesus. It can fill every nook and cranny of your life-and overflow.

My Patience Shows

‘Thou hast fully known my ... patience.’ The Greek word for patience is *hupomone* which means, literally, stay down, stay under. It’s a picture word and its truth is hard for us to learn. We tend to want to be anywhere except “under.” We jump up to assert ourselves. We blow off. The mark of the amateur, the sign of the inexperienced, the characteristic of the immature person is that he feels he must say something. Simon Peter was that kind of person before Pentecost-always vocal. We read, “Simon answered and said ... ” Nobody had asked him, but he answered anyway! Many of us are like him.

Beware of the almost irresistible temptation to make a speech on something. It is better, the wise man said, to close one’s mouth and be thought a fool than to open one’s mouth and remove all doubt.

Most of my mistakes have been made in a hurry. Most of my embarrassments have come when I have jumped into a situation without knowing what it was all about.

One day a student delegation came into my office. I thought they wanted to discuss something about which I was already uptight. So before they spoke, I launched into my speech. When I paused for breath, the chairman of the delegation said, rather mildly, "Dr. Cook, that wasn't what we came to talk to you about." Was I embarrassed! I had lost patience, the ability to stay down.

Now that does not mean evasion or sidestepping. Someone is sure to say, "Well, Brother Cook, don't you believe in compromise?"

No, I don't. I believe your testimony-your stand for Christ should always be clear and unwavering. But firm conviction need not involve your barging into situations on which you are not thoroughly informed. Learn the score. Stay under.

Patience is a by-product, actually. We could cite any number of verses that would prove this point, but this one is familiar to all of us. *Romans 5:3: "... We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope "* This verse says that the troubles-and the pressures that they bring-all produce patience. Patience is the direct result of your having gone through certain hard experiences in which you found that God is real. Having learned this, you now are willing to wait on Him the next time around. Patience is a product of tribulation. It also is a component part of growth. "Bring forth fruit with patience," we read in Luke 8: 15.

My patience affects other people's lives. I think many of my mistakes have been made because I wasn't willing to wait for God to work in other people's lives. It's a dreadful mistake when we attempt to do something before God is ready.

Many years ago I found myself in the midst of a serious personality tangle - a situation that certainly needed to be righted. In my eagerness to have the trouble cleared up, I went to the people involved-and I came away scarred and broken. Why? Because that wasn't God's time. Later He Himself worked things out beautifully. The air was cleared. God was glorified. He did it. You don't have to insist on having your own way in lots of things in life. Have you learned that? Think back to the last time you had a quarrel with somebody, at home or work or school, with parents, children, husband or wife, brother or sister, whomever it was. Tell me this: How much of what was said or implied was eternally worthwhile? How much of it will be worth remembering a million years from now? (You'll still have your memory in heaven, you know.)

“Oh, well,” you say with a little embarrassment, “it wasn’t all that important, but it seemed important at the time.”

Sure. I know. But patience will give you the long view. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:18: *“.. look not at the things which are seen ... for the things that are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”*

All depends on your point of view, doesn’t it? And that attitude on your part profoundly influences those whose lives you touch.

Patience is a means of ministering. To “minister” is to impart, to share. Paul says (2 Cor. 6:4) that we are to be found “... *approving ourselves as the ministers OF GOD, in much patience.*”

The way we “minister God” is by being patient under circumstances that would cause others to give up or blow up.

The apostle goes on to say what kind of patience is in view here:

“Patience ... in afflictions.” ... That means the troubles (different for each of us), that are a part of our daily existence.

“Patience ... in necessities.” These are the needs for which there is no foreseeable supply. What do you do when there is too much month left at the end of the money? That’s the time to be patient with God because His timing is always right. And His supply is exactly what it ought to be.

“Patience ... in distresses.” ... That means the result you feel in your body, your mind, your emotions when you are going through trouble. I don’t think it is unchristian to feel distress. Some say that if you are a good enough Christian you will never get upset by the things in life. But each of us is different from others in this respect and we react predictably according to the way we are built. Under pressure, some get ulcers, others high blood pressure, others headaches or anyone of a number of other ailments.

The point is, you don’t have to be a victim of your distresses. You can give your body and the way you are built to Jesus and let Him manage the whole package that is you. It is possible for you to walk with God and exhibit patience even in the midst of the inevitable physical and mental strain that trouble brings upon you. As you do this, you will become a victor, not a victim. Hallelujah for that!

Patience ... in opposition. (This thought is embodied in verse 11 of our passage.)

Paul says they came unto him "at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; which persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me."

Look at some of the kinds of opposition Paul faced and out of which he says God delivered him.

The account is in Acts 13:45-14:20.

There was opposition to success:

"When the Jews saw the multitudes [the whole city coming to hear God's Word], they were filled with envy, and spake against those things that were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming."

How did the Lord's servants react? Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you ... 10, we turn to the Gentiles ... When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord as many ... believed.

There was opposition from "chief" people:

The Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.

There was opposition from suspicion-venders:

In Iconium ... the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.

There was opposition marked by great extremes.

In Lystra, where the man crippled from birth was healed so that "he leaped and walked," the crowd hailed Barnabas as Jupiter and Paul as Mercurius. When the apostles heard this, they rent their clothes and ran in among the people crying, "We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God."

The fickleness of humankind brought a violent change in attitude.

There came certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium who persuaded the people [the same people who were ready to worship the apostles the day before], and having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up and came into the city; and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

There you have it - patience in the midst of opposition of all kinds ... people talking ... conspiring against you following you from place to place stirring up trouble ... even at times premeditating physical injury to you.

There is a thin line between persecutions and afflictions-and their relation to opposition. Persecution is the trouble that is caused by the people who are opposing you religiously. Affliction is the pain and the inconvenience that come oftentimes as the result of persecution. I would not be surprised if Paul walked with a limp for many a day after he was stoned.

Persecutions and afflictions because Paul had them both he has a heartening word for each of us who suffers testings in any measure similar to his.

My Response to Trouble Shows

“ endured ... out of them all [persecutions and afflictions] the Lord delivered me.” The key word that describes Paul’s attitude toward all his testings is “endured.” He says in effect, “I stuck it out; I went through all of them.” How does one do that?

Let me give you an illustration.

Suppose it is Monday morning-and you are a minister. Yesterday you preached your heart out more than once. You didn’t see too much response to the Word. Now you wake up tired and blue. (Unless you have been a pastor you don’t know how discouraged you can get.) This is the time for you to do three things: scan the long panorama of God’s goodness to you, realize that He is doing something great in your own life, and rejoice over the immensity of the plan He will unfold.

Look back, Pastor, and see what the Lord has done for you in the months that you have served that particular pastorate. I used to get a great deal of encouragement from periodically reviewing just how many prayers I had seen God answer for me since I began in that church. “Consider what great things the Lord hath done”-note the past tense. “There hath not failed one word of all his good promise,” Solomon declared, in I Kings 8:56. God keeps His word-remember that. People may be faithless from time to time but God is ever faithful. Look back and see!

Then, Pastor (or anybody) realize God is doing something great in you. I can see different stages of development in my own life in the ministry that were directly traceable to the kinds of experiences I had at the time. All along, the Lord was doing something in me.

Again, catch a glimpse of the greatness of God's plan that includes you.

Dr. V. Raymond Edman, who for many years was President of Wheaton College and my dear friend, used to say, "It's always too soon to quit-always."

There are times, of course, when change is called for, when it is definitely in the will of God for the individual. At such times His child may clearly hear His word, "Behold, I will do a new thing." He may very well move you from Timbuktu to Kalamazoo, or some other distance - but that does not mean you have quit an assignment because it is hard or because you yearn for greener pastures. Dear preacher, Sunday School teacher, deacon, trustee-all of us-remember God isn't through with us yet; He is working to a perfect master plan. There is a great deal more that is waiting to be accomplished. Will you remember that the next time you are tempted to quit? Paul endured. You and I can well learn from such an attitude.

"Endure" to be "Delivered"

The other key word that is as important as "endured" is the phrase "the Lord delivered me." When you get that combination you are invulnerable (that means you can't be shook up), and you are invincible (you can never be conquered). This combination in your attitude toward trouble-especially the kind that comes from people's opposing your faith in Christ-makes you secure and immovable.

If you want to go God's way, you must expect opposition. *"All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."* It's part of the mix.

Jesus said plainly (in Mark 10:29):

"There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, WITH PERSECUTIONS; and in the world to come eternal life."

Again He said:

"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (John 15:18, 19)

The antipathy of the unsaved person toward Jesus is built in. My friend David Morken, who has served on several mission fields. used to say, "The unsaved heart cannot rest until it is organized in opposition to God-that is its goal." That's a very cogent statement isn't it?

We speak of something “given” as that which is essentially and inevitably a part of a situation. In a triangle, for example, it is inevitable that it has three sides. Likewise, if you belong to Jesus, one of the “givens” is opposition. Expect it. You can’t avoid it, but you can glory in it. What will happen? Paul says, “The Lord delivered me” - not out of a few persecutions, not out of a few afflictions-but out of them ALL.”

He will do that for us, too. It is our part to “endure” (by His own gracious enabling of us); It is His part to “deliver”-fully, gloriously. He has not brought you this far, my dear Christian friend, only to forsake you. He does not propose to dump you now. He is going to see you through. You can depend upon your blessed Lord Jesus who said, “Lo, I am with you all the way even unto the end of the age.”

