

Words of Encouragement Dec 9th 2015

It is always better to fail in doing something than excel in doing nothing!

A. W. Tozer quoted Matthew 20:25-27 [NLT] *'You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man (Jesus Christ) came not to serve but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.'*

Tozer says: 'The essence of Christ's teaching concerning greatness was this: **true greatness among humans must be found in character, not in ability, or position.** While few philosophers and religionists of preChristian times had noted the fallacy in people's ideas of dominion and status, it was Christ who defined and demonstrated true greatness, *'shall be your servant'* , *'shall become your slave'* [NASV]. It is that simple, that easy - and that difficult!

All anyone has to do is to follow Christ in service to the human race, a selfless service that seeks only to serve, and greatness will be ours! That is all, but it is too much for many, for it runs counter to our instinct for domination. Therefore we do not take kindly to the command from God to serve! But our sinful tendency to want to dominate must give way to Christ. It was through human sin that we lost any right to domination, until we win it back by humble service.

Though redeemed from death and hell by the vicarious work of Christ on the cross, still the right to have domination must be won by each human separately. Each of us must fulfil a long apprenticeship as a servant before we even come close to being fit to rule. After Christ had served (and his service included death) God highly exalted him and gave Him a name above every name. As a human being he served and won his right to have domination. Jesus knew where true greatness lay - and we do not. [Reading for 23rd Feb. in 'Renewed Day by Day', Christian Publications ISBN 0-87509-252-7]

Have we learnt this very important reality? Possibly not, as have you ever seen a CV submitted for a leadership position in a Christian church/organisation? If you have, how different was it to a CV submitted for a secular position anywhere else? And then we wonder why the Christian Church continues to become increasingly less 'Christlike' and as a consequence increasingly spiritually powerless! Bill

Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work. Thomas Edison

STRONG AND GENTLE: In Hebrews 12:3 we read, *'Think of all the hostility he (Jesus) endured from sinful people, and you won't become weary and give up.'*

To be marked by love does not mean we are to be weak. Rather, it means that our strength is used, not to exploit, harm, or dominate, but to build up, encourage, nurture, and care for others.

Because there is such emphasis in the biblical story on love and humility, we could easily misread this to mean Christians are to be gullible, exploitable, and weak. This is a common and serious misreading of Scripture. Moses was called the meekest/humblest man in all the earth but he certainly was no pushover! He was the great prophet-leader of Israel, used by Yahweh to lead the Israelites out of Egyptian captivity and oppression. Therefore Christians can and are to be strong and gentle at the same time. In reality it takes great strength to be humble and loving, yet strength and love work well together. In fact, love is a particular form of strength. It is strength expressing itself in caring ways. To put it differently, there is nothing weak about love and humility. To love is to be strong and to be humble is simply to recognise that the sources of a strong love lie in the goodness of God in our lives. And don't forget that the first 'fruit of the Spirit' is 'love' the first evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. **For thought:** To attempt to be strong without love can lead to domination. To be strong in love is true freedom. [Adapted from the reading for the 22 Feb. in 'Hear The Ancient Wisdom' Charles R. Rigma 2013, ISBN 1-62032-772-2]

We would worry less about what others think of us if we only realised how seldom they do.

The Misuse of Holy Things: *It is entirely appropriate for those who serve in churches and religious organisations to be paid appropriately. What is not appropriate is when anyone uses their position, spiritual gifts and abilities for selfish gain, for power over others, and for any form of manipulation.*

From Gehazi (2 Kings 5:20-27) through to Simon (Acts 8:18-19) there have been those in the biblical story who have sought spiritual power for financial gain. Sadly, this has also occurred in the history of the Christian Church and continues today. Spirituality gives power. And power can be misused for selfish gain. Sadly, I have met people who are using Christian ministry for personal financial gain and incredibly in their ignorance they measure the success of their ministry in financial terms! May God have mercy on them!

The great church reformer John Hus was so concerned about this form of abuse in the Church of his day that he wrote a treatise on it. He wrote, "*all those who buy or sell the gifts of God, either for money or for some other consideration... are called Simoniacs.*"

This also poses a great challenge for our day when consumer values have, and continue to so penetrate the life of the Church that the misuse of spiritual authority and power have become a real problem. Consumerism has not been changed by the

Church, rather it has changed and continues to change the Church! Such change is not positive as the Church loses its 'Christlikeness'.

The solution to this temptation is radically simple: spiritual blessings and gifts have been freely received from God's good hand; they should be freely given. So if a gift of healing from God leads to a ministry of healing for others, then such ministry must be exercised in humility, thankfulness, and generosity of heart. It should never be exercised merely to gain financial benefits. Avarice destroys. Generosity is life-giving. Bill

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What most of us need is an alarm clock that will ring when it's time for us to rise to the occasion.

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PLACE THE GREATEST VALUE ON GODLINESS: *'Since he (God) did not spare even his own son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else.'* (Romans 8:32)

A. W. Tozer wrote: 'If the Christian Church were a pure and Spirit-filled body, wholly led and directed by spiritual considerations, certainly the purest and the saintliest men and women would be the ones most appreciated and most honoured, but the opposite is true. Godliness is no longer valued as it ought, except for the very old or the very dead!

The saintly souls are forgotten in the whirl of religious activity, the entertaining are sought after and rewarded in every way, with gifts, crowds, offerings and publicity. The Christlike, the self-forgetting, the otherworldly are jostled aside to make room for the latest so-called converted popular personality.

The whole short-sighted philosophy that ignores eternal qualities and majors in trivialities is a form of unbelief. These Christians who embody such a philosophy are clamouring after present reward; they are too impatient to wait for the Lord's time! The true saint sees farther than this; they care little for passing values; they look forward eagerly to the day when eternal things shall come into their own, and godliness (Christlikeness) will be found to be all that matters. The wise Christian will be content to wait for that day, and in the meantime, they will serve their generation in the will of God!' (Reading for 9th May from 'Renewed Day by Day' quoting excerpts from *The Divine Conquest* by A. W. Tozer)

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By perseverance the snail reached the ark.

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WASTEFULNESS WITHIN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH: It's interesting to observe what usually occurs, right across the Christian Church, when a long serving minister retires. Bear in mind that every such person represents an accumulation of years of the study of God's Word, of practical living day by day 'in Christ', of

engaging in 'prayer warfare', of dealing with people of every sort and dealing with the situations people find themselves in. Add to this the incredible investment such lives represent through years of experience walking with God in the world. This is something that cannot be taught in lectures or a text book.

So! What happens to those comprising such an incredibly valuable storehouse of wisdom and experience? Usually they are put out in a back paddock well away from where their lives could be of greatest blessing to the next generations. Yes. I know such thoughtless and wasteful practices are pretty much the accepted norm in secular industry today. But why does the Christian Church slavishly follow the example of the secular world by ignoring what God has formed and prepared for the on going benefit of His Church? The consequence is that **spiritual maturity** and **spiritual experience** are generally excluded from playing the role they ought to within our culture of Christian leadership.

I have observed such wastefulness become the norm, especially in more recent years. Names that were once front and centre disappear and are seldom if ever heard of again. It's as if individuals suddenly cease to exist! So much for fine Scriptural notions of Christians as members of a 'Christian family'! Or do such things have a use by date? Is the reality within the Church today that only for as long as an individual is 'useful' to new leadership, or the organisation, do they have 'worth'? I hope and pray that this growing tendency within the Christian Church to be becoming increasingly 'managed' according to secular 'wisdom' and less and less influenced by the living experience of the Word of God does not continue! Because, if it does, God will eventually raise up others who know him better to reflect his character, his love and his care of all his children and such change is likely to be very disruptive for the entrenched! Bill

A bad habit never goes away by itself. It's always an undo-it-yourself project. Abigail van Buren

Thousands of university students filled **Tiananmen Square and surrounding streets in Beijing** to protest their government's oppressive regime. Though they were allowed to gather for weeks, on the night of June 3, the Chinese Army massacred hundreds of these peaceful protesters. What is seldom talked about are the additional hundreds of ordinary citizens who lost their lives in the surrounding city streets attempting to hinder the advance of the army to the square.

Almighty God, please give us discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that instead we may live deep within our hearts. Grant us anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may wish for justice, freedom, and peace. Bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we can make a positive difference in this world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done. Amen

The secret of success is to start from scratch and keep on scratching.

Madam Guyon, a cultured Frenchwoman, imprisoned for her Christian faith in a prison cell in Vincennes, France from 1695 to 1705 wrote:

'A little bird am I

Shut out from fields of air,
Yet in my cage I sit and sing
To Him who placed me there,
Well pleased a prisoner to be,
Because, my God, it pleaseth Thee.

Naught else have I to do,
I sing the whole day long.
And He whom most I love to please
Doth listen to my song.
He caught and bound my wandering wing,
But still He bends to hear me sing.

My cage confines me round,
Abroad I cannot fly,
But though my wing is closely bound,
My heart's at liberty.

My prison walls cannot control
The flight, the freedom of the soul

O, it is good to soar
These bolts and bars above,
To Him whose purpose I adore,
Whose providence I love,
And in Thy mighty will to find
The joy, the freedom of the mind.

How are you going in your God given ministry of encouragement, a ministry that every Christian has and one that bursts with creative possibilities. Please feel free to forward this email on to anyone you think may find it encouraging/challenging/confronting. Real encouragement does not come through being constantly told what we already know, it lies in being challenged to take another step forward 'in Christ'.

God bless and encourage you. Bill

To be 'Christlike' is to be radical, revolutionary and counter-cultural!