

The Causes of Chronic Spiritual Failure and the Cure 2

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In the Book of Micah, the sixth chapter. Hear ye now what the Lord saith. Arise, contend thou before the mountains and let the hills hear thy voice. Hear ye O mountains the Lord's controversy and ye strong foundations of the earth. For the Lord hath a controversy with His people. He will plead with Israel. O My people, what have I done unto thee? Wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against Me. For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt and redeemed thee out of the house of servants. In Deuteronomy, the 28th, chapter, verses forty-seven and eight, because thou serveth not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee.

Now I said, I would give two talks on the causes of chronic spiritual defeat, and the cure. And briefly, in order to relate the morning sermon to this evening, I said that the summary of God's Word here to Israel and to us by extension, is that men will not serve God gratefully so they must serve the enemy sorrowfully. And he's talking about His people here. You will not serve God thankfully so you must serve the enemy sorrowfully.

And I said, that most Christians, I don't know whether I said most, but I think I could say most Christians, even though they're Christians, they're secretly not free. They're not serving the Lord with much joy. And the reason is, that they have an erroneous spiritual philosophy. Their outlook is wrong. They look on things wrongly. And the Lord dramatically says here, My people, what have I done? What have you got against Me? There is a controversy here between God and His people. And these people can't get along with God. They live in God's household, I suppose, but they can't get along with God. And the result is a resentfulness, a sense of bitterness in greater or lesser degree and a muting of the high trumpet note of joy that ought to be in their souls; muted till it's hardly heard of at all.

And the reason for this is that there are two things we don't see as we should. We do not see that God owes us nothing. That anything we get is pure grace, and that if we got what we deserved, we'd be dead. And if we went where we should go, we'd go to hell. And if we got what we should get, we'd get judgment and justice, and that anything else is sheer mercy and grace on the part of God without merit or works. And while all that I'm saying is old, familiar, fundamentalist truth, we hold it in our heads, and our hearts fight back. And we say inwardly, what have I done that I should deserve this? We grumble inwardly against God for failing to answer prayer. We find fault and

cancel the people of God. And this becomes a chronic thing within us. And we do not serve God joyfully, therefore we serve our enemies sorrowfully. And if we could get these two things settled, that we have sinned and come short of God's glory, that every thought and intent and purpose of the heart of mankind apart from the new birth and the indwelling Jesus, is only evil continually. All of them are evil continually. And that grace, the grace of God which came in Jesus Christ, to go 100%, forgiving and blessing without merit. This we believe, but this we do not believe. This we believe creedly, but we do not hold it as a part of our working philosophy of life.

Now I want to talk to you and I want to use these two great truths. Let them be the left and the right eye. Let them be the two sides, the two pillars to hold up the temple. That we should perish that we none of us here has any right to be alive. Not one of us has any right to sing. Not one of us has any natural right to sing when the gates swing out and never I'll be there. None of us has any right. This is a gift of God without works. This is a gift of God by grace. This is mercy, pure and simple 100%. And if you take these two pillars and you can let all the temple of God rest upon them. And you can view all your future and all life through these two eyes, man's absolute depravity and God's absolute grace set against each other and confronting each other.

Now, therefore, if you're ready to believe those two things, then I'm going to give you, not a spiritual experience, because spiritual experiences, I say, won't take care of this. You can come down and get blessed and wipe your eyes and go away feeling a little bit humbled and a little bit better, and tomorrow it'll be back on you again because you're not seeing things right.

Now, I want to go down the Scriptures beginning back there with Cain and Abel. And see whether the attitude of our secret heart isn't to blame God and find fault, instead of take the other way around. Look at Cain and Abel. We wonder why it was that Cain killed Abel. And Brother, when you consider that God said, the day thou eatest there thou shalt surely die. And when we consider that sin came into the world and death by sin. And when we consider what the Bible says we are, then the thing I wonder about is not that Cain killed Abel. Cain was acting in conformity with his fallen nature.

But what I wonder about is why Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice unto God? Who taught Abel the fallen man? Who came to the heart of Abel and whispered in his deep spirit that he was a sinner and would have to have a lamb for a sacrifice? That wasn't natural. That wasn't according to human nature. Human nature never responds that way. That was the grace of God preventively operating to teach the man Abel the way of life.

So that when we look at Cain and Abel and we see how they went for a walk and one slew the other. We say, isn't that terrible and wasn't that terrible? We wonder where God was and we tend to have a controversy here. But the wonder, I repeat, is not that Cain killed Abel. That's not the astonishing thing. The wonder is that Abel died and went to glory from a fallen race. The first two

children of a fallen pair, who had been alienated from God and driven from the Garden. And now these two, the fallen pair, had these two boys, fallen boys, who walked according to the spirit of this world, the spirit that worketh within the children of disobedience. One of them rose in fury and slew the other and acted according to his nature. The other one offered to sacrifice unto God before that murder, and God responded and gave him the assurance that he was righteous through accepting that sacrifice. And so let all those who read the story sing the praises of God who delivered Abel rather than listening to the brainwashing talk of the devil, and where he overcame.

We come to Noah and the seven that were saved. It says that there came a flood upon the world of ungodly, and Noah and the seven were all that were saved. The rest perished and the flood swept the ungodly away. Now my friend, when God swept the ungodly away, have I wronged thee, says God? Have I wearied thee with my conduct? Is there anybody that can charge me with wrongdoing? Had not they sinned and violated the tenure and franchise under which they operated? Were they not worthy of death? Did not divine justice cry out against the world of ungodly? And when I turned the waters loose and broke up the fountains of the deep, was I not doing what a holy God must do to preserve the moral order of the universe? And were not the wings of the seraphim and cherubim and holy watchers and holy ones yonder all waving. And were they not crying, true and righteous are they judgments, O God, for Thou hath judged men for their sins? But the wonder is that there were seven and Noah that found grace in God's sight.

So, my brother instead of my saying how terrible that all the world of ungodly should perish, my heart should cry out how wonderful that God saved His seed upon the earth. For He had no obligation lying upon Him. If your ancestors back yonder had all perished, there would be nothing now but weeds and jungle and wild ravening beasts roaming the world. And God in His great mercy saved Noah and his family. And Noah found favor in His sight, favor and grace in His sight. And the good grace of God operated to save the race and to redeem men and to bring you and me into existence.

Again, I go down the Scriptures and I find Lot and Abraham. They came out of Ur of the Chaldees and came down overlooking the green valley and the Jordan. And you remember that Abraham said to Lot, now, my boy. He was younger than he. He was his nephew. He said, My boy, we can't seem to get along. Oh, we're all right, but our herdsman fight and we don't want trouble and so it's better to separate than it is to be always having difficulties. So, you got a big lot of cattle and herds and I have big herds and a lot of cattle and camels. You take whatever you want. Now take the rest. And the Scripture says that Lot saw the green, watered valley of Jordan and chose that valley for his cattle and pitch his tent toward Sodom. And the preachers all down the years have properly dwelt on that. He pitched the tent towards Sodom.

And it's a terrible thing that he did. But is that the strange thing? Is it a strange thing that dogs delight to bark and bite, for God hath made them so? Is it a strange thing when two animals tear at

each other's throats? Is it a strange thing when the serpent strikes. It is not, for they're living according to their nature. But when the wolf lays down with the lamb and the cockatrice and the rattlesnake lie down, and the baby plays on their den without harm. That will be the wonder, my brother.

And so, when Lot chose for himself the green-watered valleys, the valley of Jordan, He pitched his tent toward Sodom. He was doing what sinners do. But the wonder was that Abraham heard the voice of God yonder in Ur of the Chaldees at all. The wonder was that in the goodness of God, that idol-maker back in the Ur of the Chaldees, without any light at all, was listening one day and heard a Voice. And the Voice said, rise and get thee into the land that I will show thee. Did God owe that to Abraham? Did He owe that to Sarah? Did he owe that to Lot? Did he owe it to anybody? He owed them nothing. But in the good kindness of God, you have these two things there for confronting each other. You have man's sin, Abraham's sin, Lots sin and you have the mercy of God confronting the sin of man. And that Lot should go on and sin and act like a sinner that he was, is nothing.

But that God should save Abraham; that was something. And can you while you're thinking about it, my brethren, can you not see that it was a greater wonder that Abraham ever allowed Lot to choose? He was the big boy and he was the older man. He had the most goods, and he was the boss of the caravan. And he could have said, now you take this, and I'll take this and Lot could have scowled and walked away and taken the little end to things. But instead of that, Abraham said to his nephew, you take what you want and I will take what's left. And he stayed on the plains of Mamre and Lot took the best part of the grazing land.

Now I ask you, who should be honored there? Who should be glorified? One man acted like the sinner that he was, and the other man acted strangely like an angel. Why, because he was one? No, he was born of the loins of fallen Adam too and he was as bad as Lot was bad. And he was born into the world with his mind made up to have his own way. But the grace of God, the wonderful grace of God confronted the sin of man there. And God for the sake of His own love, the love that will not let us go, God delivered the man Abraham from the bondage to his sin and made him able to take his long trek to the Holy Land. And when the time came, made him arise unselfishly to say, you take what you want, and I'll take what's left.

My Brother and Sister, don't you just see, that if we were to look around the other way at things, instead of assuming that God owed Abel life, instead of assuming that God owed the world of ungodly a right to live when they'd forfeited their right to live. Why, instead of assuming that Abraham did the right thing, and that Lot did the wrong thing, my brother. Abraham did the right thing. But why? Because God worked in him to will and to do of His own good pleasure. We ought to take that attitude and hold it, otherwise we've got a controversy with God.

And when we come to the burning of Sodom, some people have worried why God sent fire down from heaven upon Sodom and consumed Sodom and Gomorrah. The wonder is not that God consumed Sodom and Gomorrah. For they were sexual perverts to a point where the vilest, filthiest kind of thing went on, Paul described in Romans 1. And the astonishing thing was not that a just God, and as the liberals say, a God of love, the wonder wasn't that this God of love should hurl fire upon the cities, but the wonder was the fire ever went out and that all Asia Minor didn't catch fire, and it didn't spread across the sea to Europe and eastward to Babylon and over to China and Japan. And that it didn't burn and burn, until all of us should have been burnt out. All our ancestors before us should have perished. But that's what we deserve. And we'll never be right. And we'll never think right we'll never pray right until we know that.

Just as long as you think that there's a little good in you, and that you have a right to God's grace, why, you will be having a controversy with God. And God will be saying to you, what have I done to you? What have you got against me? Why the fight? Why can we get on, you and I? For I've given you all of this? And because you won't serve me joyfully for all of this, you will serve your enemy sorrowfully. And so, Christians everywhere are defeated. I hardly find a Christian as I travel around that isn't defeated. They have managed somehow to get on. But they're defeated Christians. Most Christians are defeated Christians, and they're defeated because they have got a bad outlook on the Scripture, a bad outlook toward heaven above, a bad outlook.

We'll go on a little way and we come to Esau and Jacob. And the Scripture says bluntly, God says, Esau have I hated, but Jacob have I loved. And people say, I can't understand this at all. I can't understand it. How can it be that God hated Esau? We've been brainwashed by liberals. We've been brainwashed by Emersonian humanists. And we've been taught that we're all a nice bunch, a nice bunch. Everybody's fine and wonderful, and that we all deserve something, and the good God who puts His wing over all, and he loves us all. We forget that God said, the wicked have I hated and Esau have I hated. And we forget that the only proper reaction of a holy God to an unholy man is violent repulsion. The only proper reaction of a holy God to an unholy man is a violent break.

And if a heaven could love hell, then hell would be heaven and heaven would be hell and there would be more chaos throughout the universe. Yet, that's what they teach us. They mix heaven and hell and compound it, and that's our Christianity. But when God said, Esau have I hated, what is wrong with that? Have you got any controversy with God over that the holy nature of God revolted against the man who would sell his highest spiritual treasure for a mess of soup?

But the wonder of wonders that ought to set all the silver trumpets in Heaven to blasting out the joys of the Lord, to set every organ to that playing is, that God loves you. Why did God love Jacob? How could God love you? How could a holy God look at a crooked fellow like that and love him; how I say? Only because mercy and grace, greater than all our sin, worked in the heart of God, only because of God in His infinite wisdom in the council chambers of the Trinity had worked a plan out

whereby He could have mercy upon Jacob. And Esau would not accept that plan, so he said, I reject it. And Esau walked away with his countenance fallen, a rejected man. And Jacob as crooked as he was, wrestled with his God on the bank of the Jordan. And God put his thigh out of joint and the sun rose upon his bald head as he went over the river to make friends with his brother Esau whom he had injured so long ago.

So the wonder here, my Brother, isn't that God should hate Esau but that he should love Jacob, and you and I should see that. We should look at those two eyes and we should take that viewpoint and not another. And instead of saying, oh, it's terrible that God should hate Esau and we should rise and take God's side and not the liberal's; and not the humanists and not religion of Cain. And we should say, O wonder of wonders that God should love Jacob. O wonder of wonders, not the soul that sinneth it shall die. That's not an angry God hurling His thunderbolts like Thor. That is a holy God declaring a philosophy of rejection, that a holy heaven can't take in an unholy hell. And that God, the Holy God, cannot fellowship with an unholy being. That's just God declaring that. That's all.

But that God should suddenly sound another note and say, Jacob have I loved, crooked old Jacob, sneaking old Jacob. Old Jacob who knew how to cheat and cheat and continue to cheat that God should say, I love Jacob. He loved Jacob, because within Jacob somewhere, there was an acceptance of an eternal plan that glorified the grace of God and put man in the dust where he belongs.

So my brother today I want to say before three worlds as Brother Ravenhill would say. I want to say before three worlds, with heaven listening and hell listening and a few people on earth listening, that I will glorify God forever for loving crooked Jacob. And I will cry with the angels above, true and worthy are Thy judgments for hating Esau.

And I think of this fellow David. Somebody wrote a book. A woman wrote a book. Women are writing sexier books now than men. I thought John Steinbeck had done it all, but there are women now doing it until they are ashamed to review it in Time magazine. Well, anyhow, a woman wrote about King David. David the King, she called it and of course she had David wallowing in iniquity. The Scripture says David sinned. David was born of Jesse. And Jesse was born of his father and his father was born of his father. And they trace them back, clear back to Abraham and clear back to Adam. And when David sinned, David was acting natural. David was a sinner. And when David sinned, he was acting natural. And if it hadn't been for the grace of God, David never would have done anything else but sin. And David would have continued to sin, and continued to sinned and died sinning and gone to hell sinning.

Oh, the infinite grace and mercy of God that David could kneel down on his knees and say, have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving kindness. And according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my sin, for against Thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight.

That's the mercy. Not that Saul didn't repent, for repentance isn't a human thing. It's a divine thing, and God has to put it in a man. So, Saul didn't repent, but David did. And instead of our saying, O God, why didn't Saul repent, we ought to kneel and say, my God, how wonderful that David repented. Oh, not that David committed that double sin, adultery and murder. When he committed adultery and murder he acted like a man. And when he said, the Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want. He makes me down to lie in pastures green. He leads me that quiet waters by, he talked like an angel. The grace of God had come in and confronted his sin.

Now I want to tell you whatever hell says about it, heaven is blowing a loud silver trumpet tonight. That David ever came back to write the 23rd Psalm and the 103rd Psalm, bless the Lord, O my soul and all that is within me, bless His holy name. That he ever came back to be the father of the Messiah who gave His life for the world.

So, my brother, you see, we've been brainwashed. That's our trouble. The devil has taught us an evil philosophy. And we go to an altar and we try to get blessed so we'll have victory. And we get up with a bad outlook on life. We get up all crooked and cross-eyed. And we think God owes us something. And we won't serve God joyfully, so we serve our own poor flesh sorrowfully.

David, I'm glad for David. And as long as I live, I will say, O wonder, wonder of wonders that a wild boy growing up in the wilderness at a time like that, with no education, that we know of, at least very little. And there in little old Palestine surrounded by the enemies on every side, that a boy should go out and lie down and look up and say, when I consider Thy heavens, and write such profound philosophy and compose such profound spiritual hymns, that the ages have been better for them. That's the wonder of wonders and we ought to vie with Gabriel while he sings in notes all most divine. I can't sing like Gabriel, if he sings. I don't know whether they sing. They say he sings, but I can vie with him in singing. But I can do my best to glorify God that he ever saved David.

And then there was Elijah. We preach doleful sermons about Elijah and the juniper tree. And that Elijah went 40 days in the strength of those pancakes an angel baked for him. He did literally, read it, it says that. It says a little bread and it was flat pancake, a barely pancake, like our pancake now. An angel baked it and Elijah went, my brother, a tired man, a man who was all out of his element. He'd walked among the mountains, Elijah had. He lived up there on the quiet fastistes where the great, rugged jutting rocks touch the blue sky above where the white goats jump from peak to peak. And he lived in his little simple home somewhere up there. I don't know where, somewhere up there. The love of God confronted the wild man, Elijah. And Elijah knew God. And Elijah learned even there among the rocks and trees and gullies, he learned to stand before Jehovah.

And one day God said to Elijah, Elijah, down there in the big world where there are cities and people and kings and princes and priests and where there are prophets of Baal and where my

religion is being degraded by Jezebel, I have a job for you. No doubt Elijah asked questions and said, great God Jehovah, what have you for me to do? I have no education. I have no courtly knowledge. I have no etiquette. I know nothing. I'm dressed in this old rugged thing, a long beard. What am I going to do down there? I've heard tell, to use an old country phrase, I've heard tell of the fine court that they have. What can I do? God said, you leave that to me. Down went the man Elijah, and walked in without announcement and suddenly appeared before the King. The King leaped to his feet and looked at him and he said, I'm from God. And I come to tell you that there will be no rain until I say so. He clicked his heels like a sergeant reporting to the commanding officer and stalked out. I stand before God, say that.

Later on, after tremendous pressure and under the threat of Jezebel to take off his head, he gave up and fled into the wilderness. Preachers have blamed him ever since. Blamed? He was acting like a man, a nervous, pressed, distraught man. A man who would love God and had dared to face out his host. And who had gone up on the hill yonder on the place they called Carmel and had faced 400 prophets of Baal and had laughed at them and worked them up to fury. And then called down the fire of Jehovah to consume the sacrifice. That's not the act of a man. That's the act of a man of God. The wonder isn't that he could flee like a man, the wonder is that he could pray like a man of God.

Are we going to let the devil and the liberals and the cheap religion of Cain brainwash us until we have a controversy with God, until we talk more about the cave of Elijah or the Juniper bush, than we talk about God, the God of Elijah? Ah, Brother, as long as I live, I'm going to thank God every time I think of it for Elijah. And I'm going to overlook the fact that he fled and got under a juniper bush and asked God to take him home. Any man might have done the same thing. There was a hero of a man. And yet, he hadn't a thing to start with but a bad seed inside his breast. He had nothing to start with but sin and yet God delivered him and made a prophet out of him and gave him to the world and the church of Christ down to this day. There's you're wondering. And if you want to ask God any questions, don't ask God why Elijah fled, ask God why Elijah prayed. If you want to go and ask God any questions, don't say God, how could it be that Elijah went into a cave. Ask Him how could it be that Elijah went into a court.

And we come down to Jesus. He was born into the world. Mary had a baby as the colored spiritual has it. She had a baby and named him Jesus. And when He appeared, only a few recognized Him. There were the four old people I preached about, God's four old friends, Annis, Simeon and Zechariah and Elizabeth, four old friends of God, and a few others recognized Him. And He came unto His own and His own received Him not. And when His own received Him not, they acted like what they were. And any that received Him did so by the sheer mercy of God and that alone. For there wasn't in human nature one trace of life, nor one eye that would have ever believed that this Jesus was the Messiah.

So that which we should ask God about is not O God, why did so few receive Thy Son? But what we should ask God is, O God, why did anybody receive Thy Son? Seeing who we are, seeing how bad we are, and seeing how selfish we are, and seeing how blind we are and seeing how we've sinned against the Light, that lighteth every man that comes into the world. And seeing how we are sinners by birth and aliens by choice, and seeing how we've studied the art of iniquity at the feet of the devil. Why did anybody believe in Jesus? And everybody that believed in Jesus when He walked among men was a bonus. It was something added, an extra that men will thank God for while they live. And that they nailed Him on the tree was entirely natural, seeing that men had the natures they had. But that He was willing to die for those who are willing to crucify him. There's the wonder of wonders.

So, let's get our philosophy right, my Brethren. You'll never have and keep spiritual victory as long as you're upside down. Get your feet under you instead of on top of you. And look at this thing right and see that all down the centuries men had sin because they're sinners and God has saved some because He's God. And that grace is operated in triumph over sin. And that's what we need to thank God for.

And there was Peter. Poor old Peter has had to take a beating. I imagine there'll be a lot of smiles in heaven. Some of us preachers will go sneaking up to Peter and Jonah and some of these fellas we had browbeaten and called out and used them as horrible examples and say forgive me, I was dumb. I didn't know any better. Here was Peter; Peter was an impulsive, nervous man, quick to love and quick to pour himself out and quick to pick himself up again, that was Peter. Peter would have made a good American. He had all of our impulsiveness and our blessed dumbness and kinks. He had all that, and Peter denied his Lord. Here he was. Oh, he said, Jesus, Jesus don't talk that way to me. Don't talk to me. You say, I'll deny you Lord; now all of these may. He said, John there, I've always suspected him. And the rest of them. I know they're weak, but good boys. Now don't think I'm talking against the Master. They're good boys, but though all should deny Thee, yet, will I not. And he meant it and he meant every word of it. And he fully intended to go out there and die. But he forgot that he was Peter. Not an archangel. He forgot that he was Peter.

So, when the pressure got on and it was obvious that Jesus had lost out. He wasn't able to help him anymore. They had him handcuffed and were leading Him off. The soldiers had him. It was evident that there was no help coming there. And they were after Peter. Peter said, I may as well salvage something out of this. So, he denied his Lord; caught in the pinch, he denied his Lord. We preachers have beaten him over the back for 2000 years for denying his Lord. In denying his Lord, he was doing just exactly what every sinner would do. He was doing just what you can expect a sinner to do. He was acting according to his fallen nature. He was doing what Adam had put in him to do.

Follow me a little. And look at this fellow Peter when the Holy Ghost came upon him and a flame of fire sat on his head. And Peter got straightened out and got to thinking right. He wrote his epistle about the blood that was more precious than that of gold that perishes. God got him straightened out and un-brainwashed him. Then look at Peter. Look at Peter in the jail. And he rejoiced and sang with the others that he was worthy to suffer for Jesus' sake. And they said, we'll let you out, but don't preach. He said, I've got to obey God, and he preached and got checked back in again. So, for a lifetime that was left, he suffered like that. That's what to think about. Who did that? Was that Peter? No. That was the grace of God in Peter.

And so, we should be thanking God every minute that the grace of God came to an impulsive, fast-talking, nervous man called Peter and made a St. Peter out of him. Thank you, Lord, for making Peter St. Peter. Thank you, Lord, for letting the sinful David write the 23rd Psalm and get cleaned from the 51st Psalm and get clean from his sin. Thank Thee, O Lord, that though Elijah fled into the wilderness, Elijah had the courage to go face Thine enemies and mine. Thank you, Lord, that though you brought the flood upon the world of ungodly, that you saved this seed alive. And you've given us this wonderful world. We've got no controversy with you, God, no controversy. You wouldn't serve me joyfully for all I've done for you, said God. So, I'll let you secretly serve your enemies sorrowfully. And that's what's the matter with a lot of us. Our philosophy is wrong, I repeat.

Well, I almost through. How do you yourself hear? On top of that I should have devised a series on that. But how about, how do you view yourself? You say you're a Christian? Well, you're a Christian, but you came late. Some of you came late. You are Christian, but you came late. Are you going to spend your days beating yourself over the back because you came late? Why don't you thank God you ever came at all? For the Scripture says no man can come to Me except the Father draw him. Have you read that? Calvin didn't write that. The Holy Ghost wrote that. No man can come to me except the Father draw him. You came, you said, I came. You thought you did. You were drawn by the miraculous, sovereign grace of God to come. And you came, and better men than you didn't come.

I've got in Miami, Florida now a doctor brother who is and always has been a better man than I. And if he'd been here 29 years as I've been and lived with you, you would have said the older brother is the better of the two. For he is a gentleman and our pastor sometimes isn't. But he's a lost man. He didn't come, I came. And I was the worse of the two and I came, he was the better of the two and he didn't come. Why? Am I going to spend my days beating myself over the head because I am not as good a Christian as I ought to be?

Listened to me, Brother. You say I'm a poor Christian. Well, don't you thank God that though you're a poor Christian, you're any Christian at all? Because that's not natural under the circumstances. Jesus Christ our Lord laid down terms for the gospel that almost guaranteed that

nobody would come, almost guaranteed it. Did you ever think about that? He laid down conditions at the door of the kingdom of God that all but ruled out the possibility of anybody coming. He said, If you come you got to deny yourself. You got to bear your cross. You got to give up your life and your soul and you're all. You've got to turn your back on your loved ones and your sons and daughters and wives and husbands and brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers and love Me above them all. And you got to give up everything and deny yourself.

Now if that isn't making it hard or almost impossible, I don't know what is. And yet, in spite of the fact that He laid impossible terms down at the kingdom of God, they've come down the years. 13 million of them died in Rome under the persecutions, the 10 persecutions, from Nero to I believe his Diocletian. Down the years, they died. And over behind the Iron Curtain now, squared-jawed, high cheekbone Russians are stalking off to church in the day and standing in their unheated church without pews and listening to the Truth. In China, some of the Christians that our missionaries won to Jesus before they were chased out are still over there fighting.

I got a marvelous phone call this last week. A man called me on the phone and he said, I make and sell choir robes. Are you interested? I said, No. We're not. But he said, why? How can you have a choir without robes? And I said, well, you must be an Episcopalian. He said, No, I'm not an Episcopalian. I'm of the Greek Orthodox Church. He said, in fact, I'm a priest of the Greek Orthodox Church, and was a priest of a Greek Orthodox Church, but he said, I quit being a priest and my wife and I make robes and that's the way we get along. He said, I'm just calling. I just happened to call you, ran into you on your church in the telephone directory. And I said, you got to the Cs. He said, yes, I got down to the Cs, Christian and Missionary Alliance. What is that, and I told him.

And then we began to talk, and bless my heart. I found a Christian. Here's a man and I said, we talked over the phone and I told him about the Lord. And he talked back and pretty soon my heart began to get warm. And he said, now let's quit talking about robes, he said. We just talked like two Christians, two men. And he said, oh, say, did you ever read the Philokalia? I said, I'm looking at it while I'm talking to you. I said I have it on the desk.

Oh, he said, there was a day in my life when I got so discouraged, I got down. I was going to kill myself. And he said I ran into the Philokalia written by the old Greek fathers back there, the saints of old Greek days. And he said, I read in that and I got down on my knees and I said, O God, forgive me. And we had a Christian on our hands, Brother, just as sure as you live. Now, I don't go along with him in wearing his long-tail coat and doing all the things they do. And I don't have to, but I found a Christian there. And there are a lot them over there and don't you allow old baldy Khrushchev to tell you otherwise, they're over there. And they're in China and they're in Czechoslovakia and they're in Spain and they're in Italy. And they're where they're not supposed to be, according to the authorities. God has His people there and how'd they get there? Anything

good in them? There's nothing good in them, but the grace of God operating. That's it. So, we're not very good Christians. Somebody says, all right.

I preached a sermon, 14 sermons on being a better Christian, you remember, the first of the year, how we can go on towards spiritual perfection. And I have preached eight or 10 more on worship here recently. So, you can't blame me for saying I'm preaching that we all ought to stand still. I think we ought to go forward. But instead of going forward with controversy in our hearts and our own outlook, we ought to say O thank God I got anything at all. Thank God, I got in. If I haven't a big crown at least I'm in. You'd have a different attitude toward life, my brother. And the whole sun would be brighter in the morning, and the whole life would be different.

Well, how to view your church now. We'll talk about that a minute. You know, this isn't the best church you've ever been in, I suppose, and isn't the worst, this assembly. I love that expression, assembly. I know some have copyrighted it and we shy away, but it's a good word. And that's what a church is. It's an assembly of the saints. It's a gathering together of the people of God. A despised minority group meeting together at stated times to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness and minister unto the Lord and pray. They are despised and they're few. And they gather in little groups, little cells and assemblies here and there called the church. This building isn't the church. It's a meeting house. The people are the church.

And how do you view it? You say, well, I know a hypocrite in that Alliance church. Well, if there's only one, let's celebrate together. Let's dance out on Union Avenue and thank God from the top of our voices there's only one. If there should only be two or ten, thank God that where a few hundred people gather there are only ten hypocrites.

Jesus had them in his little group and Peter had them in his and Paul wept over them till his epistles were smeared with it, with his tears. Of course, what do you expect? When a hypocrite gets in a church you have got nature. You've got Adam. You've got the thing the way it should be granting that we're all fallen men. But when a company of people meet together and love each other and forgive each other and put up with each other and pity each other and help each other, you haven't got nature, you've got grace. So, we ought to thank God for the grace that makes us a church at all. Not complain because there's a hypocrite sneaking around occasionally. Ah, don't forget that every fold has the lambs. Paul Rader used to say the bright light draws the bugs. And you'll find that in every church where there is life you'll find that there will be some who will be nuisances. But God uses that to buff you down and keep you humble. Amen.

And now about ourselves in our days. Some you don't feel well. You're afraid you've got the Asian flu. You've been listening to the scare talkers over the radio. Or you're afraid maybe that that indigestion may turn out to be cancer? Well, it may. It may. I think you'd be as good a Christian as the old, what's his name, was a philosopher? They came to one of these old Greek philosophers

and they said, mister, whatever his name was, your son has just died. Well, he said, I never said I had begotten an immortal son. I expected him to die. That was a little rough maybe, but then, that's looking at it isn't it? That it's facing that out. And did you think when you arrived here that you're going to have a corner on the world and never die? Maybe you will die. Maybe I'll preach your funeral. But is that a tragedy with the blood of Jesus Christ on the mercy seat and Christ mentioning your name to the Father and your name in the Lamb's book of life and a good life behind you? What are you worried about? Must we sniffle like paddled spaniels? Why can't we face up to it? Maybe I'll die. Maybe they will wheel me down here.

Some of you remember meetings we've had, maybe sniffle a bit, one or two or many. Most I suppose would say you had it coming, and I did. I mean it. I did, I did. But I'll tell you one thing Brother, just as sure as you live, I will tell you one thing. It's contrary to the nature of my ancestors. It's contrary to my English father. It's contrary to all the high nerves that I've inherited from my people. It's contrary to all the pessimistic outlook that I naturally have. It's contrary to us all, but I serve notice on the devil this hour. The fact that I've lived to be my present age is a miracle of the grace of God, as pure and wonderful as turning water into wine or making the sun stand still. And if I die tonight at midnight, I want you to remember the last thing you heard me say was that I've lived too long already and that the good love and grace of God has prolonged my days and every day is a bonus every day.

And so instead of our taking the attitude God owes me something, why doesn't He pay? Let's take the attitude God owes me nothing and everything I have is His grace. You'll be a different Christian if you'll take that and cultivate it and believe it and take that spiritual philosophy. Let it become a part of your life blood. I've preached too long, but I had it to say. God spoke these things to me and I've given them to you. Let's stand. Let's not spoil it all by irresponsible chatter. Let's go home and face next week in victory. Everybody said, Amen. Shake hands. We're dismissed.