

“RUNNING A GOOD RACE WITH GODLY WISDOM”¹

– 1 Cor. 9:24-27

“Scripture & church history are full of tragic examples of men who showed great promise but didn’t finish well... Demas served in an important, strategic, and distinguished role. Paul would not have included him on his missionary team if Demas had not shown a high degree of commitment and giftedness. But in Paul’s final inspired epistle the apostle mentions Demas in a different light (**2 Tim. 4:10**) ...He did not finish well... (&) the danger of not finishing well is a recurring theme throughout the New Testament (**Heb. 3:13-14; 1 Tim. 6:10-21**). So it’s obvious that suffering complete spiritual shipwreck was a widespread problem in the early church...

“But falling into complete apostasy is not the only way of finishing badly. The Ephesian church—*perhaps the most privileged, influential, and well-taught church in the first century*—grew cold and apathetic before the century ended. Jesus sent them a message via the apostle John (**Rev. 2:4**) ...Their love for Christ had grown cold... After decades of growth and flourishing, with a string of eminently qualified pastors that included Paul, Timothy, and the apostle John, they were finishing badly...

“There is a very real danger that someone who has lived and served Christ faithfully for most of his life might grow lazy, careless, fatigued, or lukewarm in the faith—and thus stumble to the finish. There are troubling examples of this in church history right up to the present day...
(e.g. Robert Robinson, writer of “*Come Thou Fount*”)

“And here is one reason this is such a problem: Living the Christian life faithfully is no more trouble-free the older we get. Sanctification doesn’t come any more easily with advanced age. The number and intensity of the fiery darts the powers of evil aim at us, does not diminish. The obstacles we face don’t get easier to overcome. Furthermore, Scripture warns us, ‘*Let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall*’ (**1 Cor. 10:12**) ...The apostle Paul, steadfast as he was, was keenly aware of the dangers of falling. He wrote, ‘*Run in such a way that you may win*’ (**1 Cor. 9:24**).”²

So...what follows is a biblical pattern for any believer or Bible-believing church to follow, to be a faithful witness for Christ, and not just start out well, but also finish well!

The apostle Paul repeatedly told believers to follow his example, as recorded in Scripture:

“Those things which you have *learned* and *received* and *heard* and *seen* in me *do* (*‘practice these things’*); and the God of peace shall be with you.” – Phil. 4:9

“Brethren, *be followers together of me* (*‘join in following my example’*), and mark them which walk so as you have us for an example.”– Phil. 3:17

“Be ye *followers* (*‘imitators’*) of me, even as I also am of Christ.” – 1 Cor. 11:1

¹ By Mike Edwards, Greer, SC, June 2025

² John MacArthur, “*On Finishing Well: The Apostle Paul’s Strategy for a God-Blessed Ministry and Lifelong Devotion to Christ*” (Grace to You: Panorama City, CA, 2025), pp. 1-4, & 6, italics added.

Paul also challenged every believer in regard to being a faithful witness for Christ:

“Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

- 1 Cor. 15:58

A godly missionary I heard years ago, summarized well what Paul taught in the verse above:

1. **How** to do the work – “*be steadfast & unmoveable*”
2. **What** is the work – “*the work of the Lord*”
3. **Why** do the work – “*your labor is not in vain in the Lord*”³

Paul also gave an accurate assessment of the opportunities that God was giving him:

“A great door and effectual (lit. ‘for effective service’) is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.”

– 1 Cor. 16:9

AND GOD GIVES TO EVERY ONE OF US, THAT SAME THING:

1. **WIDE DOORS OF OPPORTUNITY TO WITNESS FOR HIM!**

– *That’s a fact, & we should not deny it!*

2. **HE EXPECTS US TO GIVE EFFECTIVE, FULL-THROTTLE SERVICE FOR HIM!**

“In 2 Corinthians 4:1, when (Paul) says, ‘*We have this ministry*,’ he is speaking of the ministry he had just defined in Chapter 3: the ministry of the New Covenant...(and) we should live our whole lives with an overwhelming sense of wonder *that there is a New Covenant, we are in it, and we have the privilege to declare it to an unbelieving world.*”⁴

“Spiritual maturity comes when you stop making excuses & start making changes!”⁵

Thirdly, Paul says... AND YOU CAN COUNT ON IT...

3. **THERE WILL BE LOTS OF ADVERSARIES & OPPOSITION, IF YOU STRIVE TO DO SO!**

THE FIRST KEY TO RUNNING A GOOD RACE:

GET THE RIGHT MINDSET!

“Know ye not, that they had which run in a race all run, but one receives the prize. So run that you may obtain (i.e. ‘run to win’)... I therefore so run, not as uncertainly (i.e. ‘not without aim’)” 1 Cor. 9:24

The Holy Spirit led Paul to use a Track & Field illustration & that wasn’t by accident! It resonated deeply with those in Corinth, where they held the *Isthmus Games*, second only to those in Athens!

³ The late Gene Gurganus. He & his wife served Christ as missionaries for many years in Bangladesh.

⁴ MacArthur, op cit., pp. 8-9, italics added.

⁵ Author unknown.

SO... WHAT'S THE RIGHT MINDSET? *Philippians 3:12-14*

“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after (i.e. ‘press on’), if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren I count not myself to have apprehended: But this one thing I do, Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

1. **COUNTING** – *“Not as though I had already attained... I count not myself to have apprehended”* – vv. 12 & 13

First of all, remember: You haven’t “arrived” yet spiritually! And neither have I!

2. **FORGETTING** – *“Forgetting those things which are behind”* – v. 13

Forget about & let go of the past...because you can’t change it!

- a) Let go of the sins & failures you’ve committed and have since confessed to Him and have put under the blood of Christ. Forget too, about the opportunities you’ve missed & let pass by you—*though try to learn from them!* What’s past can’t be changed.
- b) Also forget about the *victories* & the “good things” you’ve done in your life.

3. **REACHING** – *“And reaching forth for those things which are before”* – v. 13

- a) *“Your race isn’t over! And neither is mine!”*
- b) You don’t win anything by running 3/4ths of a race well! (cf. a “**rabbit**” in Track)
- c) I need to be looking forward, not backward. Looking back & dwelling on & rehashing the past is what lots of old people do! Some young people do that too!
- d) I need to be focusing on the future, not the past!

4. **PRESSING** – *“but I follow after” (‘I press on’) ...I press toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”* – vv. 12 & 14

i.e. “Gird up the loins of your mind” i.e. “Gird your minds for action!” – 1 Pet. 1:13
The Navy SEALs have a well known saying: “The only easy day was yesterday.”

- a) God isn’t pleased with half-hearted service for Him, of just “going through the motions”—including “religious motions.” Personally speaking, I found it harder to stay on fire for the Lord at BJU, than I ever did at EMU! Going to church & reading God’s Word are good things & commanded in Scripture! But doing those will not reach unsaved people for Christ. We have to live out what we believe and earnestly share the gospel!
- b) A basic fact of life: It takes full commitment & maximum effort to achieve any truly worthwhile goal.
- c) I need to remind myself constantly, that I’m going to answer to Him one day at the judgement seat of Christ! – **1 Cor. 3:10-15**. If that doesn’t get me moving, something is seriously wrong!

SO... HOW CAN ANY TRUE BELIEVER OR ANY BIBLICAL CHURCH BE AN EFFECTIVE WITNESS FOR CHRIST?

I. BY USING GOD'S WISDOM, NOT MAN'S WISDOM! – 1 Cor. 1:1-4:21

MARKS OF MAN'S WISDOM:

A. A SLAVISH DEVOTION & LOYALTY TO PERSONALITIES, LEADERS, AND ORGANIZATIONS – 1:12-16; 3:3-9; 3:21-4:6

Our chief loyalty should be to God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ! After that, loyalty to His Word. Loyalty to anything else should be *way below* the level of those two. All men & women are sinners. Believers can be, & often are wrong! Churches, and Christian colleges, denominations & organizations can err as well! Beware of giving unquestioned loyalty to any person or organization!

Over five decades ago a well-respected Christian pastor & thinker put his finger on this problem: “...we can also say something about the attitude of loyalty. Loyalty in the Church of Christ should be in an increasing scale. To reverse the scale is to destroy the Church. **The primary loyalty must be to God as God, on a personal level.** This is personal loyalty to the person of the living God, and it is essential and first, above all other loyalties. So strongly do I feel this that I would put the second loyalty in a decreasing scale; **loyalty to the principles of revealed Christianity.** It is not that I would separate these principles of revealed Christianity from the personal God, but rather that it is because they are from Him that they have any authority.

“Third in importance is **loyalty to organizations**, not because they have been called Church organizations and have historical continuity for a certain number of years, centuries, or millennia, **but only as far as they are biblically faithful.** Below this, in fourth place, must be that which is often put first, and that is **loyalty to human leadership.** It must be kept in its proper order. **To reverse the order is to be totally destructive.** If loyalty to human leadership becomes central, we tend to show loyalty not even to our own organization (which would be horribly limited in itself) but to our own little party within the organization. But if, on the other hand, we keep our eyes on loyalty to the personal God, as our ‘first love,’ we will tend to love, on a practical level, all those who are Christ’s.”⁶

B. A DESIRE FOR SIGNS, WONDERS, AND OTHER EXTERNAL MANIFESTATIONS – 1:22a

Today, in many parts of the religious world, signs, wonders, “miracles,” “speaking in tongues,” being “slain in the spirit,” etc., are considered *THE* ultimate proof that a preacher, TV evangelist, organization, or ministry is of God. Years ago, Peter Wagner who was with Fuller Theological Seminary at the time stated: “**The simple gospel, without signs and wonders, is not sufficient to bring people to Christ.**”⁷ (sic) **But that is simply FALSE!** How do we know that?

⁶ Francis A. Schaeffer, “True Spirituality” (Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, IL, 1971), p. 173

⁷ Quoted by John MacArthur in his two tape series: “The Sufficiency of the Scriptures”, accessed 2003.

- Jesus, far from using signs and miracles as a powerful “tool” for the gospel, sometimes even forbade people whom He had healed from telling others! (Matt. 8:3-4; 9:29-31).
- In addition, Jesus rebuked those people that were crying out for signs and miracles! (Matt. 12:38-40 cf. Matt. 11:20-24).
- Furthermore, John states: “*But though He had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him...*” (John 12:37-38)
- I would also point out the obvious: Jesus did more signs & miracles than anyone in history, yet the people who witnessed all those miracles rejected Him & ultimately crucified Him!
- On the other hand, John the Baptist performed NO signs, YET Christ declared that of those born of women, “*there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist.*” – Matt. 11:11

C. THE PURSUIT & USE OF THE WORLD’S WISDOM – 1:22b

1) Management Techniques & an overemphasis on “Professionalism” & “Scholarship.”

Some examples: Bobb Biehl’s “*Masterplanning*”, DISC “*Personality Profiling*”, “*Situational Leadership/Lead Like Jesus*” etc.

2) Pragmatism i.e. *If it works, it must be right!* This is simply the Jesuit philosophy in modern dress, which is the belief that “*The End justifies the Means.*”

Paul condemns this thinking in Romans 3:8! Cf. 2 Cor. 4:2 where “Paul says he is ‘*not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God.*’... (when he says) ‘*Not walking in*’ [*panourgia*]—he employs a Greek term that literally means ‘*all working.*’ It speaks of a willingness to do anything necessary to gain ground. We translate it as ‘*craftiness,*’ but the term actually speaks of pragmatism—the belief that whatever achieves my objective is, by definition, a good strategy. Sheer pragmatism is one of the most dominant principles in the so-called evangelical movement of today, but it is essentially a blueprint for compromise... Instead of refusing to placate the world, they try to fit in. They adapt their principles, in order to stay in step with changing times.”⁸

Furthermore, if right & wrong is determined solely by “*results,*” then by that definition, Moses was a *huge* success when he struck the rock the second time in Numbers 20! *Hardly!* This unbiblical pragmatic thinking is illustrated by a statement made by the pastor of a church in Florida that had 7,000 members: “*I must be doing right, or things wouldn’t be going so well!*” By the way, we should remember to look at ALL the results—not just the ones that support what a pragmatist is using to justify himself & his actions.

Pragmatism has had an enormous impact on music & worship in the church, as well as hugely affecting Christian book publishing, preaching style & the subjects preached on, as well as church & missions methodology! There’s been a deemphasis on the Bible & huge emphasis on being “*relevant.*” Tragically, truth then becomes “*fluid*”, “*flexible*” or *lost altogether!* We run the risk of becoming knowledgeable & skilled, yet dead & dry spiritually.

D. A DEPRECIATING OF PREACHING & TEACHING AS THE VEHICLE TO IMPACT LIVES FOR CHRIST – 1:18, 21, 23, 25, 27

⁸ MacArthur, op cit., pp. 11-12, italicizing added.

MARKS OF GOD'S WISDOM:

A. GOD'S WISDOM IS CENTERED ON CHRIST & THE CROSS – 1:17-18, 24, 30; 2:2, 8

This is the total opposite of the focus & emphasis of the unsaved world, including a large portion of the religious world. **The world is focused on *self*, *being positive* (not negative), and *building up a person's self-esteem*.** Norman Vincent Peale started this trend long ago with his book “*The Power of Positive Thinking*.” That eventually grew into an unbiblical emphasis by the world on the importance of building up a person’s “*Self-Esteem*”—of which the late Robert Schuller of the “Crystal Cathedral” was probably the most famous proponent. Consider these shocking statements by him:

“Christ died to sanctify your self-esteem, and He will sanctify the ego trip.”(sic) **-NO HE WON'T!**
“Self-esteem is... the single greatest need facing the human race today”⁹ (sic)

In another place, Schuller said that the New Reformation he envisioned, “*will focus on ‘the sacred right of every person to self-esteem.’*” He even explained his rationale:
‘If you want to know why Schuller smiles on television; if you want to know why I make people laugh once in a while, I’m giving them sounds and strokes, sounds and strokes [like you would a baby]. It’s strategy. People who don’t trust need to be stroked. People are born with a negative self-image. Because they do not trust, they cannot trust God.’¹⁰ (sic) [cf. Luke 17:7-10-mwe]

In commenting on the above statements, David Wells has correctly said that **in the fairly recent past, “Schuller’s ministry... might have been viewed not as Christian ministry at all, but as comedy... Comedy this devastating would be too risky for most to attempt. But Schuller is no comic. He earnestly wants us to believe all of this, and many do!”**¹¹

An even more tragic example of this kind of thinking is illustrated by a statement by Dr. Wayne Colwell, of the Rosemead School of Psychology (a supposedly Christian organization!):

“Depression always has a loss of self-esteem in the foreground... Be slow to direct a depressed person to the Scriptures... no preaching. I would recommend a recess from church if there is preaching done in the church.”¹² (sic)

UNBELIEVEABLE!

⁹ Jay E. Adams, “*The Biblical View of Self-Esteem, Self-Love & Self Image*” (Harvest House Publishers: Eugene, OR, 1986), p. 9

¹⁰ Robert H. Schuller, “*Self-Esteem: The New Reformation*” (Word Books: Waco, TX, 1982), p. 38 & Robert Schuller in Craig Ellison, “*Your Better Self*” (Harper & Row: San Francisco, CA, 1982), p. 194; quoted by Adams, *ibid*, pp. 21-22

¹¹ David Wells, “*No Place for Truth, or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology*” (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co: Grand Rapids, MI, 1993), p. 175

¹² Jay Adams, *op cit.*, p. 22, citing Jeff Boer, “*Is Self-Esteem Proper for a Christian?*” in *The Journal of Pastoral Practice*, Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 78

By way of contrast, consider what the Bible says about the subject of self-esteem:
“*Through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.*” – Rom. 12:3

Jay Adams made some very perceptive comments in regard to the above verse:
“...Don’t fail to notice that in warning against faulty evaluation, Paul says nothing about the possibility of under evaluating oneself. That is not a likely possibility. His only warning is against making too high an estimate... Because the verse does not permit high-mindedness at all, it speaks against most of the self-worth literature.”¹³

“Because what we think of our gifts, and how well we are using them, is important to our service for Christ, we must evaluate them soberly, according to actual evidence. That is why Paul, in telling us how to evaluate ourselves, warns: ‘*If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*’ (Gal. 6:3) Stop a moment and reflect on the words ‘something’ and ‘nothing.’ Could a proponent of the self-esteem view ever bring himself to call someone a ‘nothing’? **Yet Paul did so more than once** (remember 1 Corinthians 13). And remember, Paul’s words reveal God’s estimate of Christians who are failing to live as they should!

“Many people who are accepting the self-esteem teachings not only deceive themselves by thinking that they are something when they are nothing (that’s bad enough), but they exult over it and teach God’s little ones to do the same. **It is to keep people from exulting over how good they are that Paul wrote these words.** His whole point was that we ought not to compare ourselves with others when evaluating: ‘*Let each one examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another*’ (Gal. 6:4). A sober evaluation is made **not on the basis of how well one is doing in comparison with others, but by comparing one’s work with Scriptural standards.** If we come out well on that score—and *how often do we?*—we will have solid reasons for satisfaction.”

“Nowhere does he say that we should feel good about ourselves because we exist, because we were made in the image of God, or even because, in Christ, we are made perfect in God’s sight. Rather, **because of our sinful tendency to find other people with whom it is easy to compare ourselves favorably with** (instead of basing our judgment upon genuine achievement) [see 2 Cor. 10:12], **Paul warned against all such self-deception...** Nor is a sinner able to think soberly about himself by reflecting on himself alone. (cf. esp. Prov. 16:2 & 21:2). These verses indicate that one’s self-image [i.e. how he looks at himself, or as Proverbs puts it, ‘*in his own eyes*’] is basically unsound. **When we attempt self-evaluation, we tend not to rate ourselves too low, as the teachers of the New Reformation think, but too highly.** Only God’s evaluation of the heart is truly accurate.” (cf. Jer. 17:9-10 – “*The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: Who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins.*’ (i.e. the mind)”) ¹⁴

¹³ Adams, *ibid*, pp. 23-24

¹⁴ Adams, *ibid*, pp. 115-118

Dave Hunt also made some excellent statements about these things as well:

“A mirror reflects a reality other than its own. What is man doing trying to develop a good self-image? Instead, we need to get back in line with (God)... in the ‘Human Potential Movement’ self is IT (compare that with Satan’s deception in the Garden of Eden, “*You shall be as gods*” -Gen. 3:5). It’s all about ‘I, my, me’. Eve was a great ‘self’ person... On the contrary, we’re to believe in God and Christ—not self. The biblical solution is to forget self and be in love with Him! ... ‘Be true to your authentic personhood’ is rubbish. In Luke 9:23 Christ implores us to DENY self... Anthony Hoekema wrote a book titled ‘*The Christian Looks at Himself*.’ (Instead), Why not look at God? ...Christ didn’t die for our self-worth, He died for our sin, for worms...

“But what about all those biblical self-confident guys? Like Moses? 😊 God didn’t tell Moses, ‘Moses, you’ve got a bad self-image, you need to learn to use body language and psychological techniques.’ Actually, Moses had a accurate self-image! God didn’t say, ‘Moses, let’s work on your self-image.’ No! He said, ‘*I (God) will be with you.*’ Pride is the big problem...

“Jesus said: 1) Love God, and 2) Love our neighbor. But today a 3rd one has come in: ‘Love self.’ And it’s become #1! No, love of self is a GIVEN. When Jesus said love your neighbor as yourself, he presumed you love yourself automatically (you wash, comb your hair, brush your teeth, etc.). Ephesians 5:29: ‘*For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the church*’ ...[Hunt also observed]...**Suicide is an act of self...** Martyn Lloyd-Jones once stated: ‘*If a man truly knows himself, he knows that no man can say things as bad about me than I am.*’ David Wilkerson (best known from ‘*The Cross and the Switchblade*’) asks a convicting question: ‘*How many of us would love and live for Jesus if He offered nothing but Himself—no healing, no miracles, no blessings, no nothing—just Himself?*’”¹⁵

One writer made some very perceptive observations regarding the dangerous end to which the self-esteem/self-image error leads, as well as what is its antidote:

“Self-image pops up again and again as a justification [particularly for sinful behavior]: ‘*I just don’t see myself as a mother right now*’, ‘*I can’t be fully myself as long as I’m tied down to her*’, ‘*I’ll never reach my potential unless I break our agreement...*’ The antidote to this poison is an escape from the prison of self-image altogether. The ‘*real me*’ is a mystery I can’t solve. And praise God for that, for who knows down what twisted paths that search would lead me? The saints of God share one attribute [cf. Hebrews 11]: Their eyes are turned outward, not in. Their expanded vision makes them more, not less. Rather than master of a small, distorted domain, they become citizens of a limitless kingdom—and ultimately know themselves as truly and fully they are known. Who am I? What a relief to say that I don’t really know. At a time in the past I died, and my resurrected life is now hidden with Christ in God. ‘*When Christ, who is my life, appears, I shall appear with Him in glory*’ (Colossians 3:3-4). Knowing my Redeemer, I can wait to know the real me.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Taken verbatim from a videotape by Dave Hunt, titled “Selfism” (The Berean Call: Bend, OR)

¹⁶ Janie B. Cheaney, “The Real Me” (WORLD magazine: May 19, 2001), p. 41

B. GOD’S WISDOM MANIFESTS A COMPLETE DEPENDENCE ON THE HOLY SPIRIT –

2:4, 10-16; 3:16 – Compare this point with these statements:

“One Christian advertising agent, who both represented the Coca-Cola Corporation and engineered the *“I Found It”* evangelistic campaign, paraded his golden calf brazenly: ***‘Back in Jerusalem where the church started, God performed a miracle there on the day of Pentecost. They didn’t have the benefits of buttons and media, so God had to do a little supernatural work there. But today, with our technology, we have available to us the opportunity to create the same kind of interest in a secular society.’*** (sic)

“Put simply, another church-growth consultant claims, *‘five to ten million baby boomers would be back in the fold within a month’ if churches adopted three simple changes: 1. “Advertise” 2. Let people know about ‘product benefits’ & 3. Be ‘nice to new people.’*”¹⁷ (sic)

But Guinness has wisely observed: ***“If Jesus Christ is true, the church is more than just another human institution. He alone is her head. He is her sole source and single goal. His grace uniquely is her effective principle. What moves her is not finally interchangeable with the dynamics of even the closest of sister institutions... If Jesus Christ is the head of the church & hence the source and goal of its entire life, true growth is only possible in obedience to him. Conversely, if the church becomes detached from Jesus Christ and his Word, it cannot truly grow, however active & successful it may seem to be. However spectacular its development, it will prove disappointing in the end...”***¹⁸

C. GOD’S WISDOM IS ROOTED, CENTERED & BASED ON THE WORD OF GOD ALONE –

2:1, 4-6, 13; 3:18, 21 cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:21; etc. Compare that with what goes on in a lot of today’s church conferences, church growth seminars, & Christian magazines, which shockingly, often pay little, if any, attention to Scripture! **One brief example from the magazine**

“LEADERSHIP JOURNAL”:

“...the new shape (of)...the Christian ministry, (is) well illustrated in Leadership, a highly successful journal designed for the clergy that was launched by Christianity Today in 1980... Between 1980 and 1988, 80 percent of the journal’s material was devoted to the personal crises, perplexities, and challenges encountered by the clergy, and 13 percent of the material was concerned with techniques for managing the church. Since this is an evangelical publication, it is quite stunning to observe that less than 1 percent of the material made any clear reference to Scripture, still less to any idea that is theological... The articles are single-minded in their devotion to the wisdom that psychology and business management offer, and apparently as equally single-minded in their skepticism concerning what Scripture and theology offer for addressing the practical crises of pastoral life. Even when the subjects being discussed were temptation, sexuality, church discipline, church structure, and preaching-subjects about which Scripture has much to say-the authors of the articles in Leadership thought that it would be better to look elsewhere for help in their pastoral tasks!”¹⁹

¹⁷ Os Guinness, *“Time for Truth”* (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI, 2000), p. 38

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 39.

¹⁹ Wells, op cit., pp. 113-114.

So called “*Christian Psychology*” also evidences this same problem of a total disregard for Scripture, in seeking to help people with their problems: **In one of [“Christian counselors”] Minirth & Meier’s brochures there’s not a single reference to Scripture!**²⁰ 😞

Regarding this whole area of Man’s Wisdom vs. God’s Wisdom in our lives and ministries, Martyn Lloyd-Jones perceptively wrote:

*“The church, though she has been reformed, must be constantly re-formed, semper reformanda. Always reform! The church is always to be under the Word; she must be; we must keep her there. You must not assume that because the church started correctly, she will continue so. She did not do so in the New Testament times; she has not done so since. Without being constantly reformed by the Word, the church becomes something very different.”*²¹

And what Dr. Lloyd-Jones said above regarding churches, is equally true of us as individual believers! We must constantly be evaluating ourselves, our thinking, our practices & our behavior *by the Word of God*. If we don’t, we will easily be swept away by the world and our constantly changing culture, and become something totally different from what pleases Him.

D. GOD’S WISDOM ELEVATES PREACHING & TEACHING OF THE BIBLE AND MAKES IT CENTRAL – 1:21, 23; 2:4-8

Years ago Peter Masters, pastor of Spurgeon’s Tabernacle, made a simple but wise observation: *“(Paul) doesn’t say that preaching is foolish! In fact, the genius of preaching is that you can get closer to people’s sins without getting punched up, than in any other way... You can’t talk about their rotten stinking pride, their sexual sins, etc., one on one. But in preaching, you can!”*²²

“Is not my word like fire?” declares the LORD, *‘and like a hammer which shatters a rock?’*
- Jer. 23:29 cf. Heb. 4:12-13; Ps. 19:7; etc.

CONCLUSION: 1 Cor. 4:16-17

Paul says: *“Be ye followers (imitators) of me...”*

Preach & Teach Christ, the Cross, & His Resurrection!

***Do it in total dependence on the Holy Spirit, using the Word that He has authored and inspired!
This will bring people to Christ in true salvation and build churches.***

And on the contrary...

***Shun the use of human wisdom, worldly philosophies, and management techniques,
Avoid an emphasis on external signs and manifestations, and
Beware of elevating leaders, personalities and organizations & giving them unquestioned loyalty.***

²⁰ Hunt, op cit.

²¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “What is an Evangelical” in “Knowing the Times-Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions, 1942-1977” The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, Scotland, 1989), p. 315.

²² From a tape of a message delivered by Dr. Masters at Temple Baptist Church, Detroit, Michigan c. 1971-72 at a convention of independent Baptists.

II. **BY FOLLOWING THE PATTERN LAID DOWN FOR US IN ACTS!**

Throughout the book of Acts we repeatedly find believers boldly, unashamedly telling others about Jesus Christ! Often, they are recorded as having punctuated their fearless, outspoken sharing of the gospel by declaring: “***WE ARE WITNESSES!***” And almost every time, they state that specifically regarding Christ’s incredible, undeniable resurrection from the dead!

- 1:8
- 1:22
- 2:32
- 3:15
- 4:33
- 5:32
- 10:39-41
- 13:31
- 22:15
- 26:16

Notice several things about those early believers & their sharing of the gospel of Christ:

A. NOTICE THEIR MANNER:

1) ***BOLDLY & FEARLESSLY*** sharing the Gospel ***WITHOUT APOLOGY!***

Peter:

2:32 cf. 2:36

3:15 cf. 3:13-16, 19

4:10-12 “*with boldness*”

4:29-31 “*with boldness*”

4:33

5:32 cf. 5:27-29

5:41-42

Stephen:

7:10 cf. 7:51-53

Paul:

9:20-22

9:28-29

10:39 & 41

13:31, 46

14:2-3 (notice that they didn’t run from trouble)

14:21-22

18:6

22:15

23:3-5

24:10-11 & 25-27

cf. – “*Speaking the truth in love*” – Eph. 4:15 cf. 2 John, 3 John, etc.

2) An *URGENCY TO TELL OTHERS* & also an *EVIDENT SINCERITY*!

2:22-24, 32, 36, 39-40

3:6, 12-19

4:19-20, 29-31

5:28-33

6:10 & 7:51-53

9:20-23, 29

11:23

13:38-41

3) An unwavering practice of *DEFENDING TRUTH & REFUTING ERROR*!

9:22

11:2-4, 16-18

13:6-12

13:30, 33, 34, 37

17:3, 18, 31, 32

18:4, 19, 28

19:9

23:6

24:12, 15, 21 & 25

26:8, 23

B. NOTICE THEIR *MESSAGE & TOTAL EMPHASIS*: —A constant habit of declaring *THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD*!

- 1:3
- 1:22
- 2:24—36 (esp. vv. 24, 31, 32 & 34)
- 3:15, 26
- 4:2, 10, 20 & 33
- 5:30, 32
- 10:39-41
- 13:30, 33, 34, 37
- 17:3
- 17:18
- 17:31-32
- 22:15
- 23:6
- 24:15, 21
- 25:19
- 26:8, 23

“A Buddhist in Africa who was converted to Christianity was asked why he changed religions. He replied, ‘*It’s like this: If you were walking along and came to a fork in the road and two men were there and one was dead and the other was alive, which man’s directions would you follow?*’”²³

²³ Erwin Lutzer, “*Christ Among Other gods*,” quoted in “*Reasons we Believe-50 lines of evidence that confirm the Christian faith*,” by Nathan Busenitz, (Crossway: Wheaton, IL, 2008), p. 191

C. NOTICE THEIR BELIEF IN GOD'S SOVEREIGN CONTROL OF ALL THINGS: They were willing to turn *DIFFICULTIES & DISAPPOINTMENTS* into *OPPORTUNITIES FOR SHARING CHRIST & the GOSPEL!*

7:54-8:4

12:6

14:19-22

16:23-25

18:5-17

24:10-11

“For the apostle Paul, suffering for Christ’s sake was not only a certainty; he saw it as a beneficial feature of faithful gospel ministry (see 2 Cor. 4:8-12). As Paul says in that marvelous passage in 2 Corinthians 12:9, ‘*Power is perfected in weakness.*’ For Paul, this was a rich benefit. Suffering reveals how much like Christ we are, and when we accept suffering and the perfecting work that it brings, we are conformed to the likeness of our Savior. He continues, ‘*Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions and hardships, for the sake of Christ, for when I am weak, then I am strong*’ (vv. 9-10).”²⁴ – cf. John 15:18-21; 1 Peter 2:18-25; 1 John 3:1, 13; 4:6

D. NOTICE THEIR LIFE & LIFESTYLE: *DRAMATICALLY DIFFERENT FROM THE WORLD!* – 4:16

Our conduct and behavior make a huge difference as to whether we are bold witnesses for Christ or else we say nothing to others. Does your life & lifestyle seal your lips? It certainly didn’t seal the lips of the believers in Acts, even in the face of persecution and death!

Consider the following examples:

- 5:33 – they wanted to kill them i.e. Peter & John
- 7:13 – they were slandered and misrepresented
- 7:54 – they hated & killed Stephen
- 9:16 – Jesus promised that Paul would suffer greatly
- 9:23-24 – they plotted to kill Paul
- 9:29 – they tried to kill Paul
- 12:2 – they killed James
- 12:3-ff – they imprisoned Peter
- 13:50 – they kicked Paul & Barnabas out of town
- 14:19 – they stoned Paul and left him for dead

1) **A CRUCIAL REMINDER**: Unsaved people can be-and often are-as nice or nicer than we are! People won’t get saved just because we’re nice! *We have to share the gospel message!*

2) **CHRISTIANS ARE TO BE DIFFERENT FROM THE WORLD, BUT...** that doesn’t mean be weird... or ignorant & out of touch with current events & what’s going on in the world... or

²⁴ MacArthur, op cit., pp. 16-17

live our life in some sort of a “*Christian bubble*”, avoiding contact with the unsaved! We have to mix & mingle with the unsaved, in order to have opportunities to share Christ with them! It also doesn’t justify or give us an excuse to be judgmental or condemning of others, or for us act aloof, smug, or better than others!

- 3) And don’t forget... **LIVING A GODLY LIFE IS NO GUARANTEE THAT THE UNSAVED WILL RESPECT YOU... or EVEN LIKE YOU!** In fact, they may hate you more! – 2 Tim. 3:12 “*All that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*” cf. 1 Pet. 1:6-7; 2:12, 18-20; 3:9, 13-17; 4:4, 12-16 & 5:6-10, etc.

E. NOTICE **THE WAY** that they witnessed: **REASONING WITH & PERSUADING PEOPLE!**

BUT... IT MUST BE DONE HUMBLY & BE BIBLICALLY BASED!

– 1 Pet. 3:15 “...*and be ready always to give an answer (i.e. a defense) to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear (i.e. gentleness and reverence)*”

This practice of reasoning, discussing & persuading people is seen throughout Acts:

- 9:20-22
- 9:28-29 – “*disputed*” (“*talking & arguing*”-nasv)
- 17:2-3 – “*opening & alleging*” (“*explaining & giving evidence*”)
- 17:4 – “and some of them *believed*” (“and some of them *were persuaded*”)
- 17:16-18 – “therefore *disputed* he in the synagogue” (“so he was *reasoning* in the synagogue”)
- 18:4
- 18:19
- 18:27-28 – “for he *mightily convinced* the Jews” (“for he *powerfully refuted* the Jews”) (“*utterly proved the case*” – Peter Masters)
- 19:8 – “*disputing and persuading*” (“*reasoning and persuading*”)
- 19:9 – “*disputing daily*” (“*reasoning daily*”)
- 22:1
- 24:25-27 – “and as he *reasoned*” (“and as he was *discussing*”)
- 28:23-24 – “to whom he *expounded and testified* the kingdom of God, *persuading* them concerning Jesus...and some *believed* the things which were spoken, and some *believed not*” (“and he was *explaining* to them by *solemnly testifying* about the kingdom of God, and trying to *persuade* them concerning Jesus...and some were being *persuaded* by the things spoken, but others would not *believe*.”

These last three are simply Paul’s “*defense*” at his “*courtroom*” hearings after his arrest in Jerusalem:

- 25:7-8 – “while he *answered* for himself” (“while Paul said in his own *defense*”)
- 26:1-3 – “*answer* for myself/himself” (“proceeded to make his defense/my *defense*”)
- 26:24-26 – “and as he *spoke* for himself” (“and while Paul was saying this in his *defense*”)

1) **BE SURE TO USE *SCRIPTURE*!** – cf. 1 Cor. 1-4 cf. Heb. 4:12; Jer. 23:29; etc.

- Acts 17:2
- Acts 18:28
- Acts 26:22
- Acts 28:23

2) **USE THE O.T. “*LAW*” TO BRING CONVICTION** – Gal. 3:21-24

e.g. the tract “*Are you a good person?*” & the book “*God loves you & has a wonderful plan for your life*” (both by Living Waters/Ray Comfort)

“How does the disclosure of divine truth commend itself to the *enemies* of truth? Because ‘**The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart**’ (Heb. 4:12). The truth of the Word of God strikes the conscience. We have an ally in the hearts and minds of unregenerate people. We have an ally even in those that are without God and without Christ. That ally is the law of God written in the heart (**Rom. 2:15**). The conscience is triggered when the law of God—written on their hearts—confronts their behavior.

“When we are faithful to proclaim the truth boldly rather than adulterate the Word, twist the Word, pervert the Word, or tamper with the Word in order to accommodate people’s preferences, **God’s Word will bring conviction**. When we proclaim the truth to every person, there is a receptor in every human being: the law of God in the heart. **That’s our ally in the human heart, and that’s why we aim our message at the conscience.**

“**IT DOESN’T MEAN THE RESPONSE WILL ALWAYS BE POSITIVE!** [see **Rom. 1:32**]
...But it *does* mean the unadulterated truth will always bring conviction. Charles Hodge said, ‘(Paul) knew that the truth had such a self-evidencing power that even where it was rejected and hated it (still) commended itself to the conscience as true.’”²⁵

3) **USE YOUR *TESTIMONY* AS A METHOD OF WITNESSING** – 1 Tim. 1:12-17

This is an excellent, indirect way to share the gospel. It will often cause an unsaved person to listen to the way of salvation without immediately erecting mental barricades and feeling like they’re being “put on the spot.” **But you need to be sure to quote Scripture throughout the sharing of your testimony** because, as noted above, it’s the Word of God that pierces the heart and will bring conviction, not your personal story!

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 13-14

4) **RESPONDING TO SOME TYPICAL QUESTIONS & ARGUMENTS YOU MAY HEAR FROM SKEPTICS & UNBELIEVERS:**

- a) What to say to someone who says they're an atheist or that they don't believe in God.
- b) What to say to someone who says they don't believe the Bible or that it's full of errors.
- c) What to say to someone who says, "*love is love*", that Jesus was loving not condemning, & that judging others is wrong, hateful & unchristian. – cf. John 7:24; Matt. 7:1 cf. 6; 12:25-45; 15:1-14; 23:1-38; John 8:11; 2 John 1-11; 3 John 1-8, etc.
- d) What to say to someone who says they don't believe Christ rose from the dead.
- e) What to say to someone who says we're just the highest animal & a product of evolution.
- f) The *REAL* reason most people don't believe in God, the Bible, etc.
(see "*Faith is for weak people*" by Living Waters)

F. **FINALLY, NOTICE THEIR *RESULTS*** – Acts 17:30-32

SOME *MOCKED*.
SOME *PROCRASTINATED*.
SOME *BELIEVED!*

IT'S ALWAYS BEEN THAT WAY, AND IT ALWAYS WILL BE!
NO SURPRISE, RIGHT?

SO... SHOULD WE THROW IN THE TOWEL?
NO!!!

"It's required in stewards, that a man (or woman) be found FAITHFUL!"

– 2 Cor. 4:2

Notice, he said faithful, not successful!

"Paul was certain about his own insignificance. He writes, '*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.*' (2 Cor. 4:7). '*This treasure*' is a reference to the gospel... That treasure is packaged in us. Paul describes himself—and us—as '*earthen vessels.*' It's not an elegant description; it could literally be translated as 'clay pots.'

"What does Paul intend to convey? After all, a clay pot is fragile, frail, feeble, flawed, sometimes even ugly. Not sophisticated. Not worthy of praise or admiration in and of itself. **A clay pot is simple, common, cheap, and easily replaceable. That is how we have to see ourselves.** We are *ostrakinos*—weak, breakable, essentially insignificant. That is who we are, and yet within us God Himself has deposited the most glorious treasure in the universe...

“The enemies of Martin Luther called him a privy pot—the most squalid and despicable kind of clay pot. Rather than take offense, Luther agreed. In himself he was nothing. Paul uses similar imagery in 2 Timothy 2:20, when he writes, ‘*In a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of clay, and some to honor and some to dishonor.*’ The honorable vessels are the ones used to serve the food. Dishonorable vessels are the ones used to take the waste away. We are wastebaskets, in a sense—or worse. Compared to the glory of the gospel treasure that is in us, we are like a chamber pot. The amazing reality is this: that our weakness and our smallness and our insignificance does not prove fatal to the work of the gospel. It is the very means God has chosen (1 Cor. 1:27-29).”²⁶

“I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.”

- 1 Cor. 3:6

Remember, it is God alone who gives the harvest & the increase!

“Paul...knew that the ultimate fruit of his ministry was completely subject to the will and work of God (1 Cor. 3:6-7) In short, results depend on God... (2 Cor. 4:3-6). Paul is making a point that is vital to understand. No matter how well you declare the gospel, you are proclaiming it to people who are in darkness...If your gospel is veiled, if they don’t understand it, if it doesn’t penetrate, if it doesn’t get through, it is because of their condition (cf. Eph. 2:1-2)

“...This is illustrated in Jesus’ parable of the soils (Mark 4:3-9). What matters most is the state of the *Soil*, not the skill of the *Sower*. But when a heart opens up, it is just like creation.... (2 Cor. 4:6). In other words, salvation is a divine miracle. It is a sovereign miracle. All results belong to God. Spiritual life is a creative miracle, done by God. If you’re faithful to proclaim the truth, that’s as far as you can go. Only God can save the soul.”²⁷

Let’s follow Paul’s exhortation in 1 Corinthians 15:58:

“Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, inasmuch as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord!”

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 15-16

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 14-15