



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume VII
Issue 169

Faith Without Fear

by – Kenneth L. Wilson (1916-?)
Editor of *The Christian Herald*

No NEED OF FEAR¹

“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (II Timothy 1:7).

There are many scared Christians today – Christians with no need to be scared. The Christian faith and fear simply don’t go together, contrary to what has been drilled into us by the cheerless believers who go through life as if they were walking on eggs – rotten eggs at that. One will indeed encounter eggs here and there, perhaps even some over-aged ones, but there comes a point at which anxiety ceases to be productive and becomes counterproductive. No matter how cautious one is, either the eggs are going to break or they aren’t. Besides, faith has something to do with coping with broken eggs.

As a veteran egg-walker, I know what it’s like. I know how it feels to be boxed in by one’s “faith,” restricted, constricted. And I know the agony of liberation and then the wonderment when liberation is accomplished and one discovers and recovers the faith that God’s wide, great, wonderful world is out there waiting and that one doesn’t have to be afraid of it ... For me the discovery wasn’t a matter of going from no faith to faith, but from a fear-dominated faith to one liberated from fear.

The Bible is a liberating book. The tragedy is that it



has been made a part of the apparatus of fear. Some still think the proper treatment of a sinner is to “throw the Book at him.”

Theology, which ought to be the way to describe the joy of opening wide one’s arms to a boundless sky, has become a well-ordered wall of small apothecary drawers, each carefully labeled and cross indexed, holding precisely defined and inviolable concepts. Nothing throws an apothecary-drawer Christian into more confusion than being handed a new idea that won’t quite fit into one of the drawers. Either he has to discard the old idea to make room for the new one, a process that is strenuously resisted; or the new idea is discarded, which is the easiest solution; or the new idea is reluctantly accommodated.

My “theology,” if that is the word for it, is not systematic. I’m more interested in the *theo* (God) part than in the *logy* (system) part. Some of the thoughts that impress me, and perhaps you, may be contradictory. Or, an idea that strikes me today may be different from one that struck me last week, or that will confront me next week. Some ideas may offer a clue in one setting and not in another. But none of this bothers me any more. The “whole truth” is an unreasonable expectation and an impossible demand. I’ve decided that truth comes in bits and pieces, and that if one piece seems not to fit against another, it may be simply because there are missing pieces that belong in between.

1. *Have Faith Without Fear* (1970), pp. 4-6.

(continued on page 1679)

Dear Sojourners.

END OF ANOTHER YEAR

Amazingly, here we are at the end of another year. It seems not so long ago that it was only January. We are reminded that our lives are indeed like a vapor.

“For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14).

What we live now is just the *vapor-life*, but thanks to our Father we have the hope (confident expectation!) of *permanent-life* in the resurrection.

“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory” (I Corinthians 15:53-54).

I have these words framed on the wall in my office:

The body of B. Franklin, Printer.
Like the Cover of an Old Book,
Its Contents torn Out,
And Stript of its Lettering and Gilding,
Lies Here, Food for Worms.
But the Work shall not be Lost;
For it will Appear once More
In a New and More Elegant Edition
Revised and Corrected By the Author.

The Self-Epitaph of
Young Benjamin Franklin (Age 22)

DIFFICULT DAYS AHEAD

I am sure that, like ourselves, many of our readers have been experiencing the effects of a very financially troubled economy. As many of you know we actually make our living selling used books online. This has always been a meager way to make a living, producing just enough to allow us to do what is on our hearts – the ministry of publishing. As with many who make their living in sales, we always manage to squeeze by throughout the year – making up for lack (see **EDITORIAL**, page 1688)

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This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the “preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began” (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from the law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12)
- the distinct ministry of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13).
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with ...
 - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6)
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4)

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any “church,” “denomination,” “movement,” “organization,” “mission,” “creed,” “meeting,” “school,” “conference” or “fellowship.”

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There is another thought that can either dismay or comfort us, and I choose to be comforted by it: the impossibility inherent in our seeking. We're forever hunting what we can never really find. For what we finite types are trying to do is to define the infinite, to say the unsayable. When you reconcile yourself to that, you immediately become more tolerant of the other person's definitions or statements of belief ...

The road between biblical advocacy of fear to the bold and equally biblical statement that "*perfect love casts out fear*" is a long, difficult trail littered with the bones of saints. Our love is not perfect. But love and fear cannot occupy the same ground. There may be some of one and some of the other. But the more there is of one, the less there is of the other.

If the fear of the Lord is the *beginning* of wisdom, the perfect love of the Lord is surely the *end* of wisdom. Can we assume that though we may not yet be at the end, we are, most of us, a step or two beyond beginnings?

IGNORANCE OF FEAR²

"But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." (Matthew 14:27).

But perhaps we are not much more than a step beyond beginnings. We are afraid of our shadows. And what is a shadow but a by-product of light? The only way not to cast a shadow is to live in a gray world, a life-style at which many Christians have become adept.

But it is not only shadows we fear. We are afraid of new light, which is to say new ideas, new experiences, change. We are afraid because we don't know what to expect. The familiar is always passing away.

Sometimes I think if we had our way, we would tell God exactly what He could and couldn't do, so that we wouldn't be caught by surprise.

We would tartly inform Him that He lives in church, not just any old where. That Sunday is a holier day than any other, and that while He may have appointments on other days, it's to be understood that His office hours are Sunday, 11 a.m. to noon. That when "religious" things happen He is to see to it that it happens through approved channels ...

But God is not about to be told what he may or can do and may not or can't do. He keeps breaking out all over ... It catches us off guard. We thought we had things all figured out, then something happens that doesn't fit.

Fear goes with not being able to explain something, with not knowing. Thus it would seem, would it not, that those who know God best should be least afraid – of anything? But this isn't always the way it works. The way it often works is that we confuse knowing God with containing God, imprisoning Him in a concept that gives us a sense of security. He's safely "there" when we want to peek through a Gothic arch at Him, not loose somewhere wreaking havoc with our carefully worked-out notions. When he breaks out, despite our best efforts we think we have "lost" Him. One could as well lose the universe!

Perhaps the problem is simply that we don't recognize Him when we see Him somewhere else.

There is something pathetic in even the scriptural stories of high moments of "religious" inspiration. Consider the birth of Jesus. Before the angel could tell the "*good tidings of great joy*," he had to allay the fears of the hearers: "*Be not afraid.*" Talk about irony! Humanity cowering on the threshold of good news! The same at the resurrection. How many times must the Master say ... "*It is I, be not afraid*"? Apparently every time we find Him out of the place or image we have assigned to Him!

Could it be that we don't recognize the Lord simply because we don't know Him very well?

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8.

PLAYING STATUE³

You remember how the game went. It was spontaneous and unrehearsed, the kind of thing that just happened on a warm summer evening ... There wasn't much to it, really. Somebody who was "it" took each of the others one at a time by the arm, swung him or her and let go in a kind of hammer throw. The person would then freeze in whatever position he or she landed. I'm somewhat hazy about the rules from that point on, but I think the object was to see who could hold a frozen pose the longest. The moment you altered position, even to the crook of a finger, you were "out."

I find it easy to do now what I did then – to play "Statue," to freeze a particular moment or period of history into a forever-inviolate, forever-solidified image. We are all doing it all the time, and some of the ways in which we do it stifle our growth as persons. As soon as we freeze a particular moment, a particular idea, a particular dogma, into a *this-is-it* finality, we in effect stop the clock. Then the object of the game, as we play it, is to see who can maintain his position the longest. To deviate in the slightest is to be read "out" of whatever group happens to be playing the game.

One interesting thing about all this is that each of the ideas we so willingly freeze, itself supplants some other idea that somebody else once froze ... To play "Statue" with even our social and religious documents is to say that we were wiser at one stage of our human history than we expect ever to be again, and that there is nothing more to be learned about some reverently frozen topics than what we have already learned ...

How easy it is for us to play "Statue" – to generalize the specific, to universalize the local, to eternalize the split second. When something works for us, makes sense to us, is beneficial to us, we immediately have the urge to embalm it, though there is no surer way to defeat our own good purposes ...

Some of the early settlers who came to America to achieve religious freedom promptly imprisoned

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-13.

everyone else in their concept of religious freedom. The woods were full of people playing "Statue," and they still are, people who say, "You are free to believe as I believe."

While we play "Statue" in our various ways, the world keeps on the move. We may stop our clock, but clocks will go on. The longer and deeper the freeze, the harder it is to catch up ... Taking up residence in the present tense is not as easy as it looks. When we get dewy-eyed about the past, we romanticize everyone who lived there. They were real people, and their doubts were not resolved for them any more easily than ours are.

LIVING LIFE TO ITS FULLEST⁴

There are probably a couple of reasons why we hesitate to live a particular experience to the full. One is our inherited suspicion of pleasures, and if we call them pleasures "of the flesh," they sound even worse. I have nothing against pleasures of the spirit ... but "the flesh" is where we happen to be, and though it sounds faintly sacrilegious to say it, that is where Jesus was too. To deny the reality of our physical attributes and capabilities is to make our bodies something less than the temples they are. Can we not be *fully* men without being less than men?

Then there is another reason, and that is our fear of being hurt. Boughs break. Therefore, do not commit yourself to the bough. You lose the one you love by death or in some other manner. Therefore, do not commit yourself to love ...

The thing is that hurt is of itself part of the wholeness of living. Furthermore, the risk of it is part of the wholeness of faith. Take out the getting hurt and you would take out everything significant about Christianity, including the cross. Put to one side all those who have been hurt because they lived out their humanness in their caring, and the place you put them you could call heaven. Those who are afraid to live are already partly dead ...

It's a great life! For Christ's sake, live it up!

4. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

But it is your life. When you do your living, you'll have to do it your own way, for you are you.

KEEPING UP APPEARANCES⁵

How important, anyway, are the "appearances" we think we have to keep up? Why don't we try, for a change, to be simply what we are – and get on with it? This may mean "doing your own thing."

"Image" is a big word. But Jesus, as far as I can tell never asked Himself, "Is this the way a Messiah would do it?" ... If Jesus had a public relations manager, he would have cautioned, "Whatever you do, don't be seen with sinners – it will ruin your image." But Jesus simply didn't care how He looked. If He had He wouldn't have done most of what He did ...

We have got this matter of how we look all mixed up ... For one thing, there's that verse "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (I Thessalonians 5:22, KJV) which has been used to protect more poses than you can shake a stick at. The assumed advice is that the farther you can stay away from anybody who is an undesirable character, the better. Don't be seen talking at the well with a prostitute. Don't take the once-crooked tax collector into your circle of friends. It's bad for your image.

That verse troubled me, too, until I happened to look it up in the Revised Standard Version. There it reads, "Abstain from every form of evil." And that's different! To abstain from all appearance of evil, one would have to be like those three little monkeys, with eyes, ears and mouth covered – and some Christians have incorporated exactly that timid trinity into their theology. And yet, how terribly much faith needs to see! How terribly much faith needs to hear! How terribly much faith needs to be involved!

PASSWORDS⁶

The "in" labels that we make sure can be seen when we drape our faith over the back of a pew, vary from time to time, from church to church,

from group to group ...

There are words I go to any length to avoid, not because they are meaningless but because I refuse to be coerced into giving passwords in order to gain admittance to something. I would rather stay in God's outdoors, where the best response one can make sometimes is a heart-brimming and soul-shaking silence, an inarticulate groan of spirit, a humbling bafflement of mind, even a shattering but strangely liberating doubt. There is so little one can say in a password; to use one always requires paring down one's own spirit so that it may fit precisely against some other's. To demand one means that the demander cares only secondarily about what a person *is*, primarily about what he says.

Time and again, Jesus deflated "seeming" as against "being." ... When an adulteress caught in the act was brought to Him for judgment, His accusers saw a broken law – but He saw a broken woman.

When he went to dinner with the wrong people, the self-righteous rulebook-quoting, password-demanding, label-reading, religious leaders saw winebibbers and sinners. Jesus knew what His hosts were, but evidently He preferred generous, honest sinners who enjoyed living life to penny-pinching, hypocritical sinners who did not. Besides, there is no evidence in the record that those who criticized the tablemates of Jesus ever themselves invited Him home to dinner or even to lunch.

TEN-TENTHS STEWARDSHIP⁷

One of our unlearned lessons concerns stewardship. We're still quibbling about bits and pieces. The "password" here has been the word "tithe," which means one-tenth. Stewardship has been tied up for some Christians in a neat little bundle called the tenth. And while debate rages on this pinhead about figuring it on gross or net, of whether it should go into the "storehouse" or shouldn't, we completely ignore the fact that stewardship concerns not one-tenth but ten-tenths ... Stewardship is not a classroom exercise in ►

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-29.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-36.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

fractions. It is a homework assignment in total living. There is an inescapable totality about life and faith.

HOLINESS OF WORK⁸

The usual target of pulpit wrath is body, flesh, the measurable world of the seeable, touchable and spendable. The pulpit name for it is secularism.

Secularism certainly sounds like something that should be contended against, to the last earnest drop of secular blood ... When you put “secular” against another word with which it is often contrasted – “sacred” – it gets second billing every time ...

For jobs, we have of course developed a whole scale of “holiness.” Preachers, bishops, and such are presumed to be somewhere at or near the top of the list ... But sacredness is not so much something we find in our vocation, as it is something that we bring to them ... As for the Christian, his job – whatever it is – *must* be Christian, for that is where he is, that is what he does. That is his channel and therefore his job becomes God’s channel. And if it is God’s also, it is not profane, not secular, but a holy place, and possibly even the holy of holies. Work is not something you get out of the way so that you can begin to live, begin to be holy, begin to seek the sacred. It is where God is as much as He is anywhere else.

FEELING GOOD⁹

There’s something about feeling good that we mistrust. Those comparatively few times when we’re tempted to throw wide the arms in joyous abandon, take a deep, delighted breath, and shout, “I’m glad to be alive!” something in our heritage and conscience tries to scowl us down. Our spiritual genes are crammed with the strait-laced, sober-sided, no-nonsense life-style of our Puritan ancestors ...

Is there something left over from an era when faith was dim and Druidic in such an abruptly stifled

cheer as, “I haven’t had a flat tire all summer – *knock on wood*”? Christians may not actually knock on wood, but those most likely not to, may be the selfsame people who have a knock-on-wood clause written into their theology. For that is simply another way of accommodating to a theology of despair, which, as you may have noticed, is much in circulation these days and which some of its practitioners, I do believe, find dolefully and immensely enjoyable.

There is certainly much in the world that is terribly, terribly wrong and cause for grief. One scarcely knows where to start the catalog of horror ... So how in the world – how in this kind of world – is it possible to feel “good”? Isn’t joy the supreme blasphemy in a world like ours?

It might be if it was our world, but it isn’t ... “This is My Father’s World.” ... In sickness and in health, it’s His. And if it’s His, how can we *not* take heart, just at being in it?

To put it another way, where in the face of our crazy, messed-up, mixed-up existence is there any room for the luxury of despair? Not joy, but hopelessness is the supreme blasphemy. Personally, I think that long-facedness has done and is doing more harm than two-facedness, though you will normally find only the latter on the standard, certified church sin list.

Would you believe that heavy-heartedness is something that some people actually *pray* for? The customary word is “burden,” as in “Lord, give me a burden for souls ... for missions ... for this or that.” Burden, if it means anything, means weight. The request is to feel weight, to feel guilt for not feeling guilty ... How continuous a guilt pressure are they asking for? Should it be all the time, half of the time, one-eighth of the time, one-tenth – a tithe – of the time? And do they expect to be their winsome best in their most burdened moments? ...

Personally, I dread turning into a sour pick-picky person for whom all the life has gone out of faith. I dread ever being so crushed by the weight of earth or heaven that I can’t take that deep breath and say from my toes up, “Isn’t it *great* just to be

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-39.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 44-47.

alive!” This is despite the condition of things in general and of me in particular. This despite what may come tomorrow and what will inevitably come, sooner or later.

Now, this minute, I'm alive and this is God's world.

BUT IN THE MEANTIME¹⁰

“Redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:16).

“Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time” (Colossians 4:5).

More problems could be solved by a meantime-theology than this world dreams of. Nothing is more with us than meantime. Yet it generally gets not much more than an afterthought. When we're finished making our grand plans for the future, we quit talking, as if there is nothing else to talk about, or we throw in as a last-minute concession, “But in the meantime ...”

Yet, the meantime is where life is lived, where decisions are made, where pain is suffered, where we are lonely and glad, where we laugh and cry. There is the joy of anticipation. But in the meantime ...?

Why should not the meantime reflect what we know is surely going to happen or what we believe should happen? Why must the meantime so consistently obstruct the inevitable or the desirable?

We act so often as if there is all the future in the world and no meantime. Actually, we've got more meantime than most of us have the courage to use. We just let it sit there ...

It is easier, for example, to project our unfinished business upon God than to get on with it ourselves ... For every person who is frustrated because of what he has tried to do and can't do, there are probably hundreds who haven't begun to do what they could do. Nobody has any right to feel

^{10.} *Ibid.*, pp. 48-52.

frustrated about anything until he has personally used his meantime right up to the limit ...

Not only by default or through indifference or through procrastination do we fail to live in the only place where living can be done – the present – but sometimes the very prospect of being alive terrifies us or seems immensely impractical ... We deny so regularly with our meentimes what we affirm with our eternities. And we don't even realize we are doing it.

The difficulty with waiting around for something to start is that when it does, it's hard to put your finger on it and say, “Now! It's starting!” ... Of course, you have long-range goals. You're looking forward to the day when the children will be grown, or the Democrats or Republicans are in or out, or the streets are safe, or life is less bewildering.

But in the meantime ...?

WHAT PRAYER IS NOT¹¹

I do not claim to understand the techniques of the “great men of prayer,” as they have been called, or even to know for sure what was meant by that “awe-filled” designation. What I am rather certain about is this: as we do with such efficient alacrity in matters of faith, we have turned the tables, snarled the guidelines, and switched the priorities. We've promoted “prayer” as a self-serving jiffy gadget for twisting God's arm, a soul-sided Aladdin's lamp – or, equally blasphemous, as a stern Christian duty that may not be much fun but is somewhere piling up Brownie points to our account.

What a joyless faith that regards prayer as a life sentence, the onerous pride of admission to the club! And what a faithless faith that thinks of prayer as negotiable special privilege (“*I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are*”).

There are some other things that prayer is not:

Prayer is not a way to lobby the halls of heaven.

Prayer is not a let-God-do-it means of evading ►

^{11.} *Ibid.*, pp. 53-58.

responsibilities which are rightfully our own.

Prayer is not a means by which we can persuade God to do what He does not very much want to do.

Prayer is not even a means by which God can be urged to do what is His nature to do.

Prayer is not a lever which we may use to bend God's will to our will.

Prayer is not a bulletin by which we must inform God of current news, and without which He is uninformed. (There was a seminary professor who opened his class with prayer, invariably prefaced by, "O God, as Thou didst see in the New York Times this morning ...")

We have profaned prayer, I think, by trying to organize it, program it, formalize it, and ritualize it. We try to get whole churches or cities or nations praying at the same time and preferably for the same thing, as if we were setting up a picket line to bring our grievances to God's attention or waging a cosmic protest ...

Is God any more likely to be impressed with wholesale prayer than retail, or with round-the-clock prayer marathons than with unpremeditated moments when His presence evokes an impulsive, "Thank you"? ...

When we give the impression that God may be suitably addressed only in a certain kind of language, we are, I think, guilty of introducing a crippling degree of self-consciousness into our praying. Inability to pray certainly doesn't stem from having nothing to say. Often it does stem from thinking you have to say it in what amounts to a foreign tongue. Traditional prayer-talk is unlike anything else that one will encounter outside the *King James Version* of the Bible and perhaps an old hymnbook. While we have been always exhorted to translate our faith into everyday concerns and deeds, and when the Bible has been translated into numerous modern versions, we have not yet been adequately encouraged to translate our prayers ...

Prayer is and ought to be the most natural thing in the world ... The reassurance that one word is no holier than another may provide liberation that will make prayer not only meaningful but indispensable. We don't have to force ourselves into somebody else's mold. If we could just grasp that one idea!

DEAD EARNEST¹²

The "dead" in "dead earnest" is more than a semantic coincidence. No one is fully alive who has a closed mind, and it has to be closed, solidified, ossified, petrified (as by fear) for terminal earnestness to set in. The paradox is that when in this connection we use the word "dead" we should unwittingly be so accurate ...

The thing that disturbs me most about people who think they have all the answers is that this turns into closed corporations ... It would be vexing, I should think, to live with omniscience. It is even more vexing to love with presumed omniscience, as any number of wives and husbands (and children and parents) can testify. One of the facts of life is the unanswered questions, the apparent bafflements and contradictions. Something there is in us that doesn't love a loose end, and we seize all sorts of justifications for tying them up. Quoting chapter and verse, or creedal statement, or the faith of our fathers and grandfathers, we go about frantically applying tourniquets that not only stop the bleeding but threaten the flow of life itself. Ultimate earnestness, focused to a searing, blinding light, is completely ruthless. Conviction, concern, sincerity, earnestness are meant to warm the beholder, not to incinerate him.

The only way, I submit, to keep earnestness in the asset column is to mix it with humor. Unfortunately, humor has not yet been fully accepted into the Christian cannon ... Perhaps this is because it is such an instant solvent for pomp and pretense. It has a way of cutting presumption down to size ...

It is more than mixing earnestness with humor. It's not so much a mixture of two components as a compound that is something more than the sum of the parts.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 62-65.

Humor at best is of the essence of earnestness and of life. It is a way of looking at everything through eyes that have laugh crinkles at the corners. It is the knack of seeing humor in what we do and what we are, not using it for any purpose, however good. "Humorous" is not an adjective but an attitude. It's not something you say, but a posture of mind. Humor, essentially, is humility, and perhaps that is why it is so unpopular in religious circles, where humility does not come easily.

I'm not talking, you understand, about *jokes* ... Real humor doesn't have to make a point. It's just there, bubbling up like a spring that flows whether anybody comes for water or not. One may not even necessarily get very many belly laughs out of the person who does that kind of bubbling. All you may sense is that here is somebody who does not think of himself more highly than he ought to think and that you are more open, more genuine when you are with him.

One of the reasons we've been so wary of humor is that we were handed down a pretty grim, unsmiling sort of faith. Even the word "Protestant" – one who protests – is an unsmiling word; its defenses are up and its breathing hard before anybody had said anything.

Another part of the reason for locking humor out of our faith probably goes back to the Bible. Look up the word "laugh" or "laughter" in a concordance, and you get the notion that mirth is not one of the spiritual gifts most to be sought after ... But I think we've been looking under the wrong word for our biblical cues on humor. A much better word than "laughter" would be "joy," and the Bible has a great deal – all of it good – to say about that. Joy, for my money, shatters arrogance and pride, it bubbles, is never heavy-handed, and is simply another name for the best kind of humor.

"WHAT CAN I Do?"¹³

"What can I do?" may be the phony question. There are, I will readily concede, times and places in which the question is a real and useful one ... But there is something about this question that

deserves a second listen ...

In many instances I think that "What can I do?" isn't the basic question at all. The basic question is, "What can I be?"

Being takes a lot more than *doing*, for you're never finished with it. And when you start out with the premise of *being* something the *doing* naturally follows, with considerably more perception and considerably less grumbling and foot-dragging, because then, *doing* is the logical follow-through. If you're committed to love, your love will make itself known in all sorts of ways that an unloving person couldn't imagine and certainly couldn't program. If you are committed to compassion, you recognize opportunities to use it that you would never have seen if you had simply gone out looking for something to "do."

It's my growing conviction that some stupid, clumsy things are being done in this world simply because people have the compulsion to "do" something and yet are not deeply enough committed to "be" something ...

When we ask, "What can I do?" do we really want to know? I am sure that some of us really do. God can use even our inadvertence, our inadequacies and our stumbling steps to get us to where we should go.

But the more probing, revealing, responsive question is "What can I be?"

LOVING INDIVIDUALS¹⁴

"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Galatians 5:14).

Love – genuine, Jesus-type love – is not something you *think* but something you *do*. Love is not closed eyes, but open eyes. Love is not just a warm spirit, but sore feet ... Love is not just a sentimental word, but a demanding way of life; it insists that our feet, our hands, our minds, our goals, our treasure be where our heart is. ►

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-70.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 72-74.

What a dainty dogma we have made of loving! No wonder so many people, observing the unscarred hands of the church, have been passing by on the other side. Some of these “non-believers” knew us better than we knew ourselves. They knew that we thought all we had to do was love until it hurt and then quit, when actually we had not even begun to love until it hurt ...

There is a futility in trying to love people in *category lots*. How, in the name of common sense, can you love a race? Or a nationality? Or Jews? Or Catholics? Or, for that matter, Protestants? (How can we even hate a category?) Yet this wraparound love, this love in the abstract, is the big thing with some people ...

I submit that you can't love – in the sense of having rapport – a *category* of people. You can love only *individuals* ... I think it's significant that Jesus said, “*Love thy neighbor as thyself.*” ... And He doesn't say “*neighbors*,” plural. He made it very singular, very personal, as personal as I myself am personal.

When He did use the plural – “*Love your enemies*” – it was more personal than the faceless “the enemy” that military people are prone to talk about. “*Your enemies.*” How many do you have? Not so many, chances are, that you can't count them. Not so many that you can't love them.

THE FREEDOM OF PERSONAL FAITH¹⁵

“*One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind*” (Romans 14:5).

To have faith without fear, you sooner or later have to come to terms with what you believe. Not with what a church says you should believe or what a creed says somebody else believed, but with what you actually do believe. Start here. It may not be much, but it's honest. What's the gain, anyway, of saying you believe something if you don't? Or trying to believe something if you don't? Whom are you fooling? Not God, certainly!

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 74, 3.

For so many decades we were told what we “had to” believe. In recent years we have been told what we are not to believe. At the point the bunking and debunking have left us, let us together try to discover what it is that authenticates itself to us, that provides a basis of Christian belief so credible, so joyous, so natural that our faith won't be drummed up, only discovered and used.

ESCHATOLOGY – THE LAST WORD¹⁶

“*And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all*” (I Corinthians 15:28).

When I was seventeen or so, I could have told you exactly what was coming next, world with end. I listened avidly to Bible teachers who had the future all lined out on the authority of the books of Daniel and Revelation. It may be that all they taught will indeed someday come to pass, though it is difficult to run a check on these things. But is that what eschatology (the study of last things) is all about?

Were the visions written to give us a schedule for what will happen the first hour after the world “dies” or what will then happen after that, or are they saying something much more ultimate? Are they not saying that God will somehow, in His own way and in His own time, have the last word? That we can never outrun God's compulsive, relentless love? That there is no place to hide? That somewhere, somehow, we shall have to confront Truth and that this moment of truth – or eon of truth – will reveal it to ourselves? Punishment, reward, who rules what and where and for how many millennia – these are not the prior questions. If we believe the promise, “Where I am, there shall you be also,” who needs a timetable?

“YE ARE THE POTATOES OF THE EARTH”¹⁷

We usually act as if we had been commissioned

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 80, 81.

17. *Ibid.*, pp 90-93.

to be potatoes, rather than to be salt. “*Ye are the salt of the earth*,” Jesus told His disciples. Salt is supposed to do something to something else. If we can get hold of that ordinary, little-obvious fact about salt, it makes life a lot more fun and a lot less burdensome.

For then, you don’t have to be everything and do everything. All you have to do is salt it down ... The task of the Christian is to supply salt, meaning, flavor, zest. Yet we’ve all been running around spreading ourselves thin, wearing ourselves out, trying to be potatoes. Not only are we not good at the masquerade, but we as wasting our mission. We have become clannish. We have found our very own kind and set up housekeeping ... Nobody has enough courage or enough confidence in his seasoning ability to be what every Christian is declared by his nature to be: salt.

Actually, what is salt good for, except to be expended, used up, on something other than self? Salt, no matter how potent its savor, is no good by itself. You can’t eat it. And who wants salt-on-salt? But it is the rare person – the rare Christian – who appears to be willing to spend himself to enhance the flavor of something or somebody else ...

I’ve never heard anybody say, upon forking in a mouthful of mashed potatoes, “My, but this salt tastes good!” Yet that’s the kind of comment we who are supposed to be the salt of the earth seem to be doing our best to elicit about ourselves.

There is this about salt that should make us think twice before fishing for compliments or even expecting them: the only time you can taste salt is when you’ve got too much of it in something ...

A cold, sober fact of life is that it takes a lot more potatoes than salt to run the world. A little salt can go a long way. Ounce for ounce, pound for pound, the impact of salt has it all over potatoes. But to make the impact, the salt must get in touch with the potatoes. Christians have been afraid of dirtying their hands of their minds or their dogmas that they’ve avoided “the world” like the plague. Yet, that’s where the salting has to be done.

What, I wonder, are we saving our salt for? Is it just that the right stew hasn’t come along? ... And yet food would be a tasteless disaster without salt. Life also would be, and is, a chronic case of the blahs without “salt.” ...

What would happen if we let ourselves go? If we let our faith out of the shaker? If we stopped attacking the motives and methods of everybody in the world, and added what it is that we can add – zest, confidence, purposefulness, love, compassion? What would happen if we tried giving ourselves away? ...

In short, what if we got out of the potato business, where we don’t belong, and into the salt business, where we do belong?

Salt is that extra something ... It is not cumbersome, heavy-handed, but lissome, winsome, joyous. To the place where he is, the Christian adds a hope, an outlook, an excitement that it would not have without him. He does not supplant what is, but wakes it, brings out the best in it, nudges it more alive, more noble than it knew it was or could be. Salt brings out the hidden capacity of men to be the children of God. And we instead have tried to intimidate them into the Kingdom, preach them in from a riskless distance, argue them in, scare them in, entice them in, all the while withholding ourselves.

It will be a small world and a small Kingdom if we can enjoy only that piece of it created or re-created in our own image. It will be an immense task if we have to build every stick and stone of it from scratch. No wonder we feel overwhelmed! Our job is to season what is already there, sharing the qualities that are our calling.

“Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Colossians 4:6).

EDITORIAL (continued from page 1678)

in the last two months. Unfortunately, this year those "last two months" just did not come – sales being down significantly.

It would appear that difficult days may lie ahead. But these difficulties are, for us who know the Father, only new and bountiful opportunities to learn contentment and divine-perspective dependence upon Him – being His vessels of mercy, His channels of blessing – pointing others to what is real and sure.

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Corinthians 4:17-18).

KENNETH L. WILSON

I know almost nothing about Kenneth L. Wilson (1916-?), except that he was once the editor of *The Christian Herald*.

One of the benefits of being in the used book business is that hundreds of books pass through my hands in

a week's time, and being a gleaner at heart, I am always on the lookout!

A few weeks ago I happened upon Wilson's book, *Have Faith Without Fear* (1970). Immediately upon reading only a few lines I knew I had found a friend in him. Even though I am fairly confident that I will never meet him this time around (chances are extremely high that he is now asleep in Christ). I have enjoyed his in-print fellowship nonetheless.

I started out gleaning his book for *Daily Email Goodies*, but before I was done I felt compelled to share these gleanings with you as a complete set here in this issue of the *Bible Student's Notebook*. I trust that you will find that he ministers to your heart as he has my own.

Until next year,
My love to you,



Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

