

THE PEACE OF GOD SHALL KEEP OUR HEARTS AND MINDS IN CHRIST JESUS!

in Christ Jesus

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY
6633 W. WALYBURG CIRCLE
MEQUON, WISCONSIN 53092

Presented by:
H. E. Russow
Nebraska District Pastoral
Conference
Colorado Springs, Colorado
April 20-22, 1971

THE PEACE OF GOD SHALL KEEP OUR HEARTS AND MINDS IN CHRIST JESUS!

I. THE BASIS OF A HAPPY LIFE.

Everyone desires happiness, but relatively few people find it. Social workers, pastors, psychiatrists, and psychologists fill their hours trying to help desperate, unhappy people. Americans spend billions on new homes, furniture, appliances, autos, and recreational equipment. A variety of radio and television programs are available to multitudes at the switch of a dial, and people while away their spare hours with sporting events, professional jokesters, and other forms of entertainment. Yet no age has ever seen so much unhappiness! Nervous breakdowns, suicides, broken homes, drug addiction, alcoholism, unrest, and unruliness are the hallmarks of our time. Behind the facade of gaiety and the appearance of well-being lies a deep and pervading sense of loneliness and anxiety. Why are people so unhappy? The answer is to be found in the Bible. It tells us that man was created in the image and likeness of God, was made holy and sinless, and was designed to live the holy life in fellowship with his Maker. But now, since Adam's and Eve's choice in the Garden of Eden, man is a sinful creature, alienated from God and needing forgiveness. St. Augustine was right when he wrote in his famous CONFESSIONS: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and we shall never find rest until we rest in Thee."

The first step toward a happy life must be a spiritual one. If one wishes to escape from frustrations, failure, and fear, one must be right with God. Each person needs to have confidence in God's existence, possess the assurance that his sins are forgiven, and receive the strength of God through the Holy Spirit to overcome the evils that wreck and disturb our lives.

A. FAITH. The Bible emphasizes the importance of believing, telling us that without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). This faith is more than a vague belief that some kind of higher power exists, and that in some way all things will work out well. Biblical faith is not mere wishful thinking. It is based upon the only True and Triune God, on His holy, infallible Word, it is grounded in history, it has intellectual content, and it involves the entire personality of the one who possesses it.

FAITH IS BASED ON FACT. The faith of which the Bible speaks is not a blind, irrational leap, but a reasonable step based upon sound evidence. Actually the naturalist and the evolutionist are the ones who have taken an illogical position which requires blind faith. Such are at a complete loss to explain how intelligent life came about through sheer accident, and they are baffled by the second law of thermodynamics, which demands TIME for evolution. For example, scientists agree that the sun is gradually losing its heat, and one is forced to conclude that our sun was put into its place recently enough to be still effective today. We are never to forget that some of the greatest scientists are men of faith, convinced that the Designer and Creator of the universe is the True God revealed in the Bible.

The faith in God that brings happiness, however, does not rest upon these evidences. Rather, it is grounded upon God's revelation of Himself through His Son by the Holy Spirit, as recorded in the Bible. Almost 2000 years ago Jesus Christ appeared on this earth, claimed to be the fulfiller

of the Old Testament prophecies, and declared Himself to be God. He said that He would die for the salvation of sinners, asserted that He would rise the third day, and gave credence to His claims by His miracles and His teaching. The religious leaders of His day hated Him because He exposed their hypocrisy, and they finally succeeded in crucifying Him. He was buried, and much to the surprise of even His disciples, the Lord arose from the dead, as He had said. For a period of 40 days following the resurrection, He made appearances - at one time to more than 500 people - and then ascended to heaven. Ten days afterward the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus' disciples, causing them to proclaim the Gospel of the living Christ with such effectiveness that countless thousands became believers in the Lord Jesus. These fulfillments of the promises and prophecies of God in all the 66 Books of the Bible are given by inspiration of God and thus are also trustworthy historical documents as well as the sure ground of faith. (To strengthen our own faith and the faith of those whom we counsel, we will recount and mediate upon these basic and wonderful tenets of the Christian and saving faith.)

If one is to achieve happiness, he must believe God's declaration in and through Christ. An atheist may be a relatively good person, and may be able to look at life without losing his composure, but he cannot be a truly happy man. No one can find joy in believing that man's only prospect is complete extinction. To be happy, man must know God through His Word, believe in Him as the Savior, know that He loves us, and be consciously aware that God stepped into history in the person of Jesus Christ to show us who He is, who and what we are by nature, what He has done to rid us of sin, and thus to provide for our ETERNAL happiness.

FAITH HAS DISTINCT CONTENT. The faith of which the Bible speaks is not vague and indefinable. The Scriptures declare that God has eternally existed in Three Persons, and that He is infinitely holy as well as limitless in power and love. The Bible also makes known to man His sinfulness, and points out that only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ can man find and receive the forgiveness of sins.

Furthermore, the faith of the Bible is not a work through which one earns salvation or merits favor with God. It is merely the God-provided link by which the needy sinner is connected with the redemption which God has provided. Many pastors are confronted with anxious people who bemoan their "weak faith," and despair because they do not feel that it is strong enough to please God. Faith may be weak, but God's power, love, and grace are strong, and if that faith is placed in Christ, salvation is sure. When one realizes that salvation is all of grace, and that it is a gift received through faith, then he will not be upset or feel insecure if someone criticizes that he was not baptized by immersion, or that he must speak in tongues before he can be saved, or that he must have some special sort of experience, that he must keep the feast of the Tabernacles, or some other Old Testament observance. He will know that his faith, weak and imperfect though it may be, is placed on Jesus Christ and what He has done for him. This realization alone will give spiritual security and stability. And with spiritual security and stability one also has - and in this way only - physical and mental security and stability.

The pastor will always bear in mind that the individual and not the problem is the center of attention. Therefore the pastor's aim is not to solve a particular problem which is at present troubling the individual, but rather to assist the individual to grow in faith and repentance. Thus he will find the proper solution in his present problem and by faith will avoid or be able better to solve future problems. Luther realized that it

Library

6633 W. WARTBURG CIR.

is impossible to solve men's problems by simply looking up what the Bible has to say and then applying the rule as the answer to the problem. Luther pictures himself, and all pastors, as simply advisory persons who speak the Word and through the Word lead men to faith and repentance.

FAITH EMBRACES THE WHOLE PERSON! We have seen that the faith which brings happiness is rooted in God's Word and has intellectual content. It also involves the emotions and will. When a person believes the Gospel, he cannot help but love the Lord, be grateful to Him, delight in doing His will, and be completely secure. St. Paul wrote: "...God be thanked, that whereas ye were the servants of sin, ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you." (Rom. 6:17) The content of faith is described in the words: "that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you," while the emotional and volitional aspects are expressed in the words: "ye have obeyed from the heart." True faith produces a new outlook and a changed life.

Would to God that we and all Christians could always be complete and constant believers! It is in these areas of wavering faith and capitulation to the devil, the world, and our own flesh that our own emotions and wills (and those whom we counsel) come into conflict with God's Word and will. We will come to defeat unless we realize that our sins are covered by forgiveness and unless by repentance we are humble enough to accept that forgiveness from God.

B. FORGIVENESS. The second ingredient of a happy life is the assurance of divine forgiveness. When a person believes in God and recognizes himself as a morally responsible being before God, only then will he be aware of his own sinfulness.

THE NEED FOR FORGIVENESS. Many people have become neurotic because they are living with deep feelings of guilt. Some psychologists would say that they have only a guilt complex, and that they must abandon the idea of a personal God who observes their every thought and act. Such advice may result in a certain freedom from the FEELING of guilt, but the FACT of guilt will remain. This philosophy of life ultimately leads to frustration and despair, for if there is no God to condemn sin, then there is no God who gives life meaning. One cannot believe in his own worth unless he acknowledges responsibility to the God who made him. For a person to be happy, he needs to know how his sin can be forgiven. Only then can he find happiness in fellowship with his Lord.

THE GLORY OF JUSTIFICATION. One cannot fully appreciate the teaching of the Bible regarding forgiveness unless he understands the doctrine of justification. He must know that "justified" means "declared righteous." He must realize that he, the accused and condemned, has been acquitted of guilt and restored to a place of favor and acceptance with God. The glory of justification is that God pardons sinners on the basis of the work of the Lord Jesus. This gives the weak, blundering, imperfect individual the assurance that by faith the Lord leads him in all phases of his life here and will receive him to Himself at death. He is assured, that although his faith is weak, by faith he does not lose his new position with Christ. The joy of communion with God is restored as he confesses his sins and repents. He knows that the way to God is always open. In faith he knows that God will never remove him from the place of favor into which he has been brought through faith.

THE NEW LIFE. We have pointed out that true happiness is attained by confident faith and belief in a personal God, and the assurance that the guilt of sin has been removed. In the continuing process, another definite need is deliverance from the power of sin. Thus true believers have received a new life, a new birth, which enables them to overcome sin. This new birth is necessary because everyone is born with a guilty and depraved nature inherited from Adam. The seeds of selfishness and the inclination to evil are a part of our fallen humanity, but God does not seek to repair or improve this inherited nature. Instead, He imparts the new life to the one to whom the Holy Spirit gives the true faith in Christ, and that person becomes a new creation. (II Cor. 5:17)

The power of the new birth has been demonstrated in the lives of millions. Men and women in the grip of alcoholism, homosexuality, and every imaginable vice have found deliverance through the Lord Jesus Christ. All forms of neurosis, psychosis, and depression can and will be healed in the power of faith and in the new birth. The transforming power of the Gospel cannot be overexaggerated.

Many Christians are perplexed, however, because they are still far from what they ought to be and what they desire to be as the true children of God. Though experiencing a growing measure of victory over sin, they are still plagued by evil thoughts and selfish desires. This continuing struggle arises from the old sinful nature which remains in the believer throughout his earthly life and the Christian is distressed by the constant presence and resurgence of the Old Adam. But the believer knows that he can triumph over sin and all the problems of life by continually looking to Christ in faith. He finds strength in the content of his faith based upon God's Word and the power of the Spirit. He finds solace in the forgiveness of sins based upon Christ's work. He finds courage to lead the new life in the blessedness of the new birth for he knows by faith that Christ has conquered the devil and has given to the believer the strength to fight and to overcome the devil, the world, and his own flesh.

II. PHYSICAL HINDRANCES TO A HAPPY LIFE.

Most people who come to the pastor with problems are seeking spiritual help, and often their problems are caused by some physical factor or factors. Some suffer periods of deep depression because of poor health, or crippling handicaps, or senility, and others are disturbed because in their affliction they feel a spirit of rebellion against God. They find it hard to believe that a person experiencing physical distress or limitation can be truly happy. We cannot fully understand the anguish of those who suffer constant pain or who must live a very restricted life, and we should not be harsh in judging them. The fact is, however, that many people with severely impaired health have found great pleasure and satisfaction in life. Each of us will recall parishioners whom we have served who were blind, or ill with terminal cancer, or bedridden with some chronic disease, but who nevertheless were radiant with true happiness and we have come away from such visits with the feeling that we gained more from them than we gave them.

Often afflicted Christians, deeply moved when they hear about godly saints triumphing over serious bodily pain or handicaps, long for the same victorious attitude and result. Indeed, some who truly know the Lord go through times of severe despondency and discouragement. This is not because of a lack of provision on God's part, however, for He is ready to give to

every sufferer the needed grace to rise above affliction. To be happy in the midst of physical hindrances, the Christian must exercise his faith, and actively practice love constantly remembering and using the power of his Baptism by faith, using the power of the Word in the water to drown the Old Adam.

To be a happy person, the suffering child of God must first exercise faith in God. True, some people without faith are able to stoically accept their lot not complaining or showing signs of weakness or mental breakdown, and a few unusual individuals actually rise above their difficulties through actively helping others. Actually, all that such have done is to divert their own attention from their problems and in keeping busy, try not to notice them. But only the believer can rejoice in the confidence that he has a heavenly Father who loves him. Only the believer can be secure in the fact that he has a Savior who died for his sins and paid their guilt and penalty. Only the believer can find strength to overcome sin, the promptings and power of the devil and his own evil nature in the power of the Holy Spirit. Only the believer can possess the assurance that some day he will be delivered from his present plight to enter a glorious eternity of perfection and happiness. To enjoy these Christian certainties, to maintain stability and joy in spite of physical and mental difficulties, the child of God must exercise his faith, accepting what the Bible says about suffering and following its exhortations.

The suffering child of God will believe the Bible when it declares that the Lord has a loving purpose in permitting trial and testing, and assures us that His plans will be realized. He is all-powerful, and not a mere spectator standing by helplessly as we languish in pain. He freely imparts His power to us. Moreover, He is too wise to make mistakes and too good and loving to be cruel. Each will have to exercise his faith by believing that God sees his suffering from the perspective of infinite wisdom, and realize that He leads us to happiness, contentment, and security through affliction, thus producing purity, patience, compassion, and childlike trust or dependence on Him.

Suffering is a purifying factor in the lives of God's children. It brings spiritual and physical values into their proper and true perspective, even as fire removes alloys from raw ore in the production of fine steel, pure gold, or sterling silver. Job, the classic example of a godly man who endured grievous distress of body and mind, recognized this refining purpose when he said: "...He knoweth the way that I take; when He hath tested me, I shall come forth as gold." (Job 23:10) commenting on this passage of the Scriptures, this parable has been told: "It is said that if a bar of steel worth \$5 were made into ordinary horseshoes, it would be worth \$10. If the same steel were manufactured into needles, the value would rise to \$350, but if it were made into delicate springs for expensive watches, it would be worth \$250,000. Most of the increase in value lies in the labor, giving it temper, cutting it to proper size, and passing it through the fire again and again. It must be hammered and manipulated, beaten and pounded, finished and polished until finally it is ready for its delicate task." This parable has an application for every child of God. We must realize that God expends His efforts only for the purpose of seeing blessed results. We need the clouds, the dark days, the storms and the rain just as much as we need the sunshine; and God, who is molding and leading our lives, seeking to make us like unto our Lord Jesus Christ, is the One who knows what is best for us.

We must remind ourselves that our God wishes to purify us unto Himself. Affliction of any kind, mental or physical, can have only this purpose in the Christian. We will exercise our faith, follow the Biblical instruction and find true happiness in all conditions in our spiritual and physical life only as the Lord tests and purifies us through His Word.

Physical and mental suffering are also means through which God develops patience. St. Paul declares that as Christians "We glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience." (Rom. 5:3) This is much more than passive endurance, for it is the attitude which actively overcomes difficulty in the power of God. Many of God's children have testified that out of and after pain and crippling disability and mental breakdown they have extracted an inner peace and serenity never before experienced. This is the patience of which St. Paul speaks - a sweet consciousness of God's presence which nothing can destroy.

Affliction has true value as well in leading people to become compassionate. St. Paul praised the God of all comfort: "Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them who are in any trouble, by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted of God." (II Cor. 1:4) We often have little sympathy for others until we experience tribulation ourselves. Some never learn to intercede with genuine compassion for the multitudes who suffer from hunger or dread diseases or mental problems or physical weaknesses or senility until they themselves have undergone physical or mental trials. If our affliction gives us true concern for others and enables us to pray for them effectively, it is certainly worth whatever discomfort we might endure.

Pain, blindness, senility, or physical or mental disease may be necessary to teach us to be humbly dependent upon God. Isaiah says: "...In returning and rest shall we be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." (Is. 30:15) God told the Israelites that they would be delivered from their desperate situation if they would rest their confidence upon Him instead of seeking alliances with heathen neighbors. Like the people of Israel, we have a tendency to trust in our own strength or to consult those whom we consider wise friends rather than humbly turning to God. Sometimes we must reach the place where our fellowmen are no longer able to help us before we can and/or come to rely wholly on God. Yes, God afflicts us to correct us and to draw us close to Himself in order to make us truly happy and blessed. He loves us, works to purify us, teaching us lessons in patience, compassion, purity, faith, and dependence on Him. His gracious purpose is that all things will work to our eternal, and physical and mental good.

Follow the Biblical Exhortations. We exercise our faith, not only in believing what the Bible has to say about all kinds of suffering, but also in following the practical exhortations it contains. We will consider two injunctions here: - "Count it all joy when ye fall into various trials." (James 1:2) "My son, despise thou not the chastening of the Lord." (Heb. 12:5)

Count it all joy. St. James was addressing believers enduring persecutions for their faith when he wrote: "Count it all joy when ye fall into various trials." His words have a definite application to every handicapped and suffering (mental or physical) child of God. Of course, St. James did not expect believers to jump up and down in glee because of affliction, but he did expect that they could find occasion for joy in their suffering. They were to reflect upon what it could do for the development of their Christian character and the deepening of their Christian experience and consciousness.

In all times of stress we must remind ourselves and those whom we counsel of all that God has done for us, how He has proven His love for us in Christ. Believing this will keep us from becoming rebellious against God or complaining that He has not been and is not being fair to us. To think of the multitudes who live without faith in a loving heavenly Father, who have absolutely no hope as they contemplate death and eternity, will put these things into proper perspective. As we exercise our faith in God, we will experience a deep inner joy even though at times we may shed bitter tears of pain and disappointment. We will indeed find that life is worth living, for under God, it is the prelude to eternal life. The periods of depression will always be made less severe by faith, and God's grace will lift the Christian up again and again, thus to find many reasons for joy and optimism.

Despise thou not the chastening of the Lord. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that we must not "despise" the chastening of our heavenly Father. We often need correction, and God does exactly for us what a good earthly father does when his children need to be disciplined. Children never appreciate discipline at the time it is being administered. Its value is seen later. Thus it is in our relationship with our heavenly Father. We may not always understand God's ways, but in faith we yield to Him, neither rebelling against Him nor languishing in despair. Again, this requires an exercise of faith on our part, but God has given us abundant reason to believe in Him, and to have absolute confidence in His wisdom, love, and power. When we do, then only can we be happy and secure.

Practice Love. The way to happiness in suffering is not only to be found in exercising faith, but also in practicing love. One who is cut off from the normal activities of healthy people (in body or mind) often feels "left out." He soon thinks that people do not care, begins to take a low view of himself, and finally even doubts God's love for him. Such a person finds it hard to think or talk about the Christian faith and life. He does not have the proper estimate of himself as the object of God's care, he cannot love or trust people who seem to be neglecting him, and does not know how he could possibly love a God who has been so slow to answer his prayers. He is tempted to engage in self-pity and say: "How can I love God when He doesn't show any love for me? How can I love people when they do not care for me? I am a nuisance to others and I might as well be dead." We will meet this type of person often in our pastoral care. He may not express himself that clearly so that we can come to grips with the problem easily, but we will become aware of this problem when we see such a person being quite friendly with relatives and friends when they come to visit, but then hear the complaint that the ill person is quite demanding or irritable (or even downright mean) to the spouse privately.

Such a one must be shown that the Lord did not hide His love from us, neither did He make love an option with us. No person can be truly happy or feel that he is fulfilling his purpose in life without love for God, for others, and for self. Also, no pastor or individual can help another in his problems of body, mind, or soul without expressing that love quite noticeably.

The problem that many people face, however, is a practical one. How can one develop real love for God when one's lot in life seems to be unfair? How can one love inconsiderate people? Is it possible to love one's self when one feels rejected and completely unlovely? The apostle John saw this problem, and indicated the way to fulfill our Lord's commandment. He says that it is impossible to love God (and thus be at peace) unless we first love the people around us. Cf. I John 4:20.

Thus the physical and mental problems that afflict us can become a real cause of unhappiness and grief when we allow them to separate us from God. We can come to grips with them only when by the Spirit's power we put down the Old Adam and exercise our faith and practice love. To come to these attitudes and actions ourselves, and to lead others whom we counsel to the same place, is the work of God, accomplished only through His Word, which alone can show and work this love. Therefore, to help those who come into our spiritual care in these matters, we must first pray God to put down our Old Adam, exercise our faith, show our love, and by God's leading bring His love, that the proper response may be found to the healing of both body and mind. Our expression of sincere love and concern is a strong preachment.

III. THE EMOTIONS AND A HAPPY LIFE

Christians are often controlled more by their emotions than by their thoughts, knowledge, and faith, and therefore they alternate between heights of joy and depths of despair. Man cannot be really happy as long as he has so many emotional ups and downs. One realizes that he hurts his testimony for Christ by his failure to display at least serenity, if not joy, in adverse circumstances. Even when such a one tries Bible reading and prayer, he does not somehow find the help that he needs. He becomes impatient with well-meaning Christian friends and relatives who have given him this advice or formula as a cure for all spiritual and emotional ills. If such a one is shy, nervous, irritable, and uncertain of himself, he faces many difficulties that the outgoing and likeable person does not encounter (and we should be alert to this situation), yet God has made provision also for such to live a satisfying and rewarding life.

In this section we will carefully consider the emotional life of the believer. We will recognize that it has been affected by sin; that its problems are universal; and that God will enable each Christian to overcome doubt, fears, and periods of depression.

A. THE EMOTIONS ARE AFFECTED BY SIN. God has made us with the capacity to love and to hate, to be joyful and sorrowful, to be elated and depressed. These feelings are necessary for our completeness as persons. What would life be like if we could not love, or if we could never experience joy? But we must sadly admit that the emotional aspect of our being, which so enriches life, can also cause a great deal of distress because of sin, for we also hate and are sorrowful and depressed. We must therefore evaluate our own and all emotions and understand them in the light of the Bible, which clearly teaches that our affections and sensibilities are out of balance because of our sin (original and actual), and that every person as a sinner is subject to certain emotional difficulties. The Bible tells us how we can overcome anxiety, fear and bitter dejection.

The emotional balance of every human being is disturbed because we are all sinners. God made us to love Him, our fellowman, and ourselves. Since God is absolutely holy, loving Him with our whole heart rules out affection for anything sinful or defiled. When we truly love God we will hate sin and be completely unselfish in our attitude toward God and others. When we do this, then a proper respect for God, or ourselves, and for others will follow. But we must sadly admit that this isn't the way we are. We are a sinful race, we have the inclination to do wrong to God and man. Even the good things we do for others are often tainted by selfishness, and our lives are marred by our evil desires, envy, and pride.

We can and must never underestimate the effect of the Old Adam in us as we struggle with sin and seek forgiveness and happiness. Each of us knows that the Old Adam is there, but we know him so well and experience the problems he makes so much that we would just as soon sever our acquaintance with him and ignore his presence. None of us would deny the existence of the Old Adam in us, nor doubt his tremendous and killing effect in our lives and problems, but as children of the New Birth we would like to live the life of the New Man so much that we may, at times, seek to delude ourselves that the Old Adam isn't really there after all. We do not give him his due, and the devil helps us in this. Also, there are the tendencies to and failings of weakness and cowardice (which we despise) in the Christian which come from the Old Adam also, and which we would just as soon not see or admit. In our Christian struggle we would be rid of these so dearly, that the tendency to overlook or shy away from their source is great. Thus we live in a sort of spiritual schizophrenia which contributes to our emotional problems.

Neither ought we overlook the fact that the Old Adam brings an added difficulty in counseling. The devil, the world, and the flesh oppose the urgings of the Word and the Spirit and increase the problem of achieving the good and desired result which we seek and which the person himself seeks. The proper will and desire may well be present, but the doing lacking. We need only look to ourselves to understand this. St. Paul understood it well. We will help those whom we counsel in this struggle (and ourselves too) only through the Word and the power of the Spirit.

Furthermore, we do not possess the perfect balance between the mind, the emotions, and the will which marked man before the Fall. These three elements of personality are never found in complete harmony in fallen man. An individual with an outgoing personality may find pleasure in the company of others and appear to be quite happy, but he may tend to be superficial, and be poorly equipped to meet life's adversities. Financial disaster, the loss of a loved one, or the news that he is suffering from an incurable disease will often cause such a person to collapse. On the other hand, the introvert, inclined to be quiet in the presence of others, to shun close friendships, and to engage in undue self-examination and self-criticism, must be watchful that he does not become morbid and bitter. The emotional life lies in need of daily correction, and we need continual reminders of our obligation to love God above all things, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Because we are weak and sinful beings, we stand in need of God's help if we are to experience equanimity and find true happiness and peace in the midst of all the problems of life and death.

B. EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS ARE UNIVERSAL. As we continue to evaluate our emotions and the emotions of others we must recognize that doubts, fears and times of despondency are common to all. Even some of the outstanding Bible characters experienced emotional turmoil. Jeremiah, one of the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, often wept because of the spiritual condition of the people to whom he ministered, and in one moment of bitterness even cursed the day of his birth. On another occasion he was so discouraged that he vowed never to preach again. John the Baptist, a man of whom our Lord said that no greater had been born of a woman, began to have doubts while languishing in prison, wondering if Jesus Christ were indeed the true Messiah. (Mt. 11) The apostle Paul, Christ's most energetic follower, many years after his conversion cried out: "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom. 7:24) It may help the individual to know that he is in good company if at times he becomes depressed because of doubts and fears. We are not to allow feelings of guilt and sadness to plunge us deeper into despair. God knows our weaknesses, and He understands, and He helps; He pities us. (Ps. 103:13, 14)

In evaluating our emotions, we should also recognize that they are closely associated with our nervous system, which in turn is influenced by our physical condition. Glandular disturbances, extreme weariness, or the reaction to a particularly moving experience may bring about an emotional response with spiritual overtones. Genesis 14 describes the stunning victory of Abraham over a confederacy of heathen kings, and the following chapter shows him in a state of spiritual depression. The same thing happened to Elijah. After the dramatic contest with the priests of Baal on Mt. Carmel, (I Kings 18 & 19) and the remarkable answer to his prayer for rain, he became frightened when the news reached him that Jezebel was preparing to kill him. He fled in fear and sat under a juniper tree, feeling rebellious against the Lord and asking that he might die. Even today many of God's servants declare that after an extremely busy day or season of spiritual activity they must fight a feeling of frustration and depression.

Because of the close relationship between the physical and the emotional, believers who are disturbed in various ways should be advised to have a complete physical examination. And perhaps they should somehow curtail their activities to avoid the exhaustion that brings on inner problems. Furthermore, after any experience of great intensity, one should be prepared for the emotional letdown which almost invariably follows.

Good advice to ourselves and to those whom we counsel in such instances might run like this. "Remember, my friend, these conflicts that sap your strength and energy and make you unhappy are common to mankind. Do not allow guilt feelings to deepen your problem. Comfort yourself with the realization that some of the finest saints have had similar problems and trials, and they were able to emerge victorious in the power of God. Take whatever steps are necessary in medical treatment or a reduced schedule to eliminate the misgivings and apprehensions that seem to rise when you are not feeling well, or if your body and mind have been overtaxed. God desires you to be happy and at peace. He wants your life to be rich and rewarding. Trust in Him."

C. EMOTIONAL HELP IS ATTAINABLE. No person should ever think that his nervous or emotional condition is such that he is doomed to a life of unhappiness. The Lord will enable us to live victoriously. If we are undergoing emotional or spiritual problems there are two things that we must do as we read our Bibles and pray: remind ourselves of God's faithfulness, and concentrate on the great redemptive facts recorded in the Word of God.

Remind yourself of God's faithfulness. Instead of bemoaning our doubts and fears, driving ourselves into deeper depression, we can take the positive attitude and talk to ourselves. This may sound like strange advice, but it is exactly what the psalmist did when he was in a state of despondency. He said: "Why are thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise Him, who is the Health of my countenance, and my God." (Ps. 42:11) The psalmist was apparently unable to join with others in the public worship of the temple, and ruthless enemies were making life miserable for him. He was discouraged, but he did not remain so. He reminded himself of God's love, His power, His forgiveness, and His gracious purpose, and this gave him the emotional uplift that he needed.

St. Paul was in prison awaiting execution when he wrote his second letter to Timothy. This young man was probably gripped with a spirit of fear as he thought of Paul's death and the future of the Christian Church. The apostle gently reprimanded him, and reminded him of the gracious provisions that God has made for His children: "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." (II Tim. 1:7)

The Christian need not be afraid, for God has given him His Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of power. The Christian may be weak and timid in nature, ill and disturbed because of sin, but God's presence and power will enable him to fulfill every task that God calls him to do, and will give him the strength to meet the trials and temptations that will come his way.

Controlled by God's Spirit, the Christian will also be able to love with the kind of love that God has shown him. The fear of failure stems from self-love and self-concern. To combat this the Lord gives to the believer His Holy Spirit to produce in him an unselfish love for God and for others, and this is a spiritual characteristic which is essential to real happiness and peace.

The third quality that the indwelling Spirit of God bestows upon believers is "a sound mind." This means that every Christian has the gift of self-control, discipline, and discriminative judgment. As we obey our Lord and trust Him, we will see all things in their proper perspective, and be able to evaluate them as they really are. Having received "a sound mind" by God's Spirit, we will view all things in their eternal context and this eternal outlook will keep our emotions in their proper place.

Dark clouds of apprehension need not mar our present days. We can be happy and at peace in the assurance that we have been given the Holy Spirit and that His coming into our life has brought the three desperately needed graces: power, love, and a sound mind.

Concentrate on redemptive facts. We must also focus our thoughts upon the great redemptive facts recorded in the Bible. The Lord Jesus actually lived and died, arose and ascended into heaven. These things really happened. The Bible gives us both their history and significance. If we really desire peace, security, happiness, mental health, and spiritual health we must base our assurance and hope of these and of eternal salvation on the solid redemptive truths of Scripture, not upon the variable and unpredictable emotions.

The late F. B. Meyer is credited with a fine illustration depicting the proper place of the emotions in the believer's life. He speaks of three soldiers to whom he gives the names "Fact," "Faith," and "Feeling." He points out that these three military men must march in the proper order. "Fact" must take the lead, with "Faith" in second place, and "Feeling" must follow the other two. "Faith" must always look forward to "Fact" never glancing back to see how "Feeling" is coming along. If "Faith" does look back, he stumbles, failing to keep step with "Fact." - The application of this to the Christian life is obvious: our FAITH must rest upon the redemptive facts of Scripture. When FAITH does this it is strong and unwavering, but when it becomes dependent on FEELINGS, looking to the changeable emotions, it will waver and become ineffective. Thus, the next time doubts begin to rise in our hearts and we feel despondent, we are to exercise the faith which God has given us, centering our thoughts on what God has done to make Himself known to us, what He has done to save us, and ask Him to strengthen our faith.

It is true that we may not always FEEL saved, but we will remember that our salvation is not based upon our feelings. It is grounded upon the facts of what God has done for us. The realization of this will enable us to overcome our anxieties, and with the psalmist we will be able to say, "I shall yet praise Him, who is the Health of my countenance, and my God." (Ps. 42:11) Emotional disturbances need not rob us of happiness and peace. We can live above the faltering and feeble attitude which would rob us of inner peace and joy as we place our trust in what God has done for us and in what He will continue to do in and for every believer.

IV. GUILT FEELINGS AND A HAPPY LIFE.

The minister of the Gospel who is sensitive to the spiritual needs of his people will spend much time in prayer asking the Holy Spirit to adapt his words of counsel and his sermons to the heart of each individual. Some of his listeners, seeking superficial delight in worldly pleasures, are unconcerned about the spiritual quality of their lives, and must be jolted with strong warnings. Others are burdened by a deep sense of guilt, however, and need words of comfort and healing, for their attitude of self-condemnation is a devastating force in their lives. Undue remorse breeds the fear of rejection by both God and one's fellowmen. This sense of alienation results from an inability to receive spiritual help from either Bible reading or prayer, and a feeling of loneliness gradually develops symptoms of paranoia in the victim so that he thinks that everyone is against him. He becomes furtive and secretive, and withdraws more and more from others. Unhealthy guilt feelings also render one's life ineffective, taking their toll in the body and mind by sapping the energy which could otherwise be channeled into prayer or useful work. Such a one is unable to achieve peace and happiness because of his remorse over sins of the past or present, and his feeling of failure grows as he considers the wasted time and the squandered opportunities of his life.

A. THE PROBLEM OF SIN. Deep guilt feelings may stem from something done in the past, or may be the result of an unholy habit from which one has been unable to free himself. No one can be truly happy and at peace until he is released from the burden of self-condemnation (justified or unjustified).

Sins of the past. Often a person's feeling of guilt relates to a particular sin or sins of the past, sins committed long ago. The evil word or deed seems so dreadful in nature that the troubled Christian cannot believe that it is pardonable. It may have been adultery, or an act of gross perversion, a lie that hurt someone deeply, or a blasphemous statement - but it cannot be forgotten. Such are being swayed by changeable and unpredictable emotions rather than by the truth of God, since the Bible clearly states that Christ has paid the price for ALL sins and gives a number of specific examples of people who fell deeply, but still experienced the joyous assurance of complete forgiveness. Those suffering from guilt feelings must have Christ's atonement for ALL sins stressed to them because they insist on declaring that SOME sins cannot be forgiven. They can be swayed and convinced from this position only by the clear Word of God which shows us the depth of sin of which David and St. Paul were guilty and then also shows how they rejoiced in the certainty of the complete remission of their iniquities. God will give the consciousness of restored fellowship today in the same manner as He gave it to King David, and, as St. Paul recognized himself as being on display as an example of God's mercy to even the vilest sinner, so we can have the same assurance.

Present imperfections. Feelings of guilt involving sin may also concern present thoughts, attitudes, or practices which one knows to be wrong. One has prayed for deliverance from them, but it has not come. One has prayed and has read the Bible. He has determined not to fall again, but one is still struggling with these same certain sins. He has not reached the holy walk that he desires. If this is a description of our own life or the life of one whom we counsel, then we should: 1) be thankful for the earnest desire to be holy, 2) recognize the role of Satan, and 3) comprehend the biblical truth that we will not receive complete deliverance from sin until we reach heaven.

1) Indeed, we should be grateful to our Lord that our conscience is still active, that we desire the holy life and long for the sweet communion with God. While giving thanks to God for these holy aspirations which He has placed within us, we will also pray for His Holy Spirit, for His power and peace, knowing that as long as we are troubled over our sins, the Lord has not forsaken us.

2) It may also be comforting to know that some of our doubts and emotional stresses come directly from Satan, who is the formidable foe of all of God's children. He is a liar from the beginning and would like to have us believe that there is no forgiveness for our sins of the past or the present. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood only, we are at war with the one who wishes to destroy our soul, therefore he troubles the souls of the children of God to wrest them from the Lord. Once he no longer troubles us, and we are no longer troubled about our sins, then Satan has won.

3) The Bible also shows us that we will always have our Old Adam, our sinful nature, until we die. No one will be perfect until he reaches heaven. Jesus does, however, urge us to work and strive toward perfection even though He knows that in this life none of us will completely attain it. Therefore we must realistically face our present imperfections, our sins and shortcomings, confess them, repent of them, and then with a whole heart believe that God does indeed forgive them and cleanse us from them. Only this faith and attitude will bring peace to our hearts and those whom we counsel.

We SHOULD long for holiness, that is our goal, but at the same time we are to realize that in this life we shall never be free of sin. God tells us to confess our sins, to make amends to the best of our ability where we have sinned against men and then unreservedly trust His grace. Our sins and failures should not throw us into a spiritual tailspin; that is what Satan wants. Even though we cannot achieve sinlessness and unmarred happiness in this world, we do have the promise that we will one day realize that goal through continued faith and repentance. In the meantime, in the power of God we can experience renewed victory over sin, and grow in the grace and knowledge of God. Our life will not be perfect, but it can be happy and satisfying.

B. THE PROBLEM OF VAIN REGRET. Another burden that hinders happiness and peace and depresses the lives of many Christians is the matter of vain regret. With an ever-increasing sense of guilt over wasted time and squandered opportunities, they look back and say: "If I had only followed and believed in Christ sooner!" "If only I had NEVER done that!" For the benefit of those who are spending their time and energy mourning over past failures we should make three observations: 1) it is foolish and wasteful, 2) it is paralyzing; and 3) it is basically selfish.

It is foolish. To be morbidly occupied with past failure is foolish and wasteful because the clock of time cannot be reversed. The past cannot be recalled, and all the regrets in the world will do nothing to correct or remove past sins and failures. The adage: "No use crying over spilled milk" makes good sense here. That we should learn from our mistakes of the past, and that we should learn lessons from our sins of the past is true, but we should never submerge ourselves in vain remorse over past sins, over wasted years, or over lost opportunities. Live for Christ NOW!

It is paralyzing. Such unhealthy grief is always paralyzing, for it robs one of present effectiveness in Christian living and in the joy of salvation. We might compare the person who spends his time grieving about

his past sins and the lost opportunities of the past to the singer whose talent is discovered late in life. Suppose such a vocalist, when given a chance to sing before a nationwide audience, said: "I should have been doing this for the past twenty years. I have perhaps only ten years left to exercise my abilities, and therefore I think that I will just forget about this new opportunity. I will just keep thinking about the twenty years which have gone by." We would say to such a person: "Man, don't be so foolish. Forget about those years during which your talent was wasted or unused. Take advantage of the opportunity that you have now!" Thus we are not to fret and grieve over the past, and stand still while doing so, but USE the blessings and powers and opportunities and talents that we possess NOW to glorify God and to bring blessings to our fellowmen. In short, we will GET WITH IT! We will serve the Lord TODAY with joy and zeal.

It is selfish. An unwholesome attitude of gloom toward the past will reveal that one is still self-centered. If one really loves God with all his heart and truly loves his neighbor as himself, then he will do all that he can to serve his Lord and his fellowman, leaving the matter of his past sins in God's grace. Undue concern over past sins and failures is selfish and often stems from the desire to be highly esteemed or from self-esteem or both. Each Christian should follow the example of St. Paul, who even though he deeply regretted that period during his life when he blasphemed the name of Jesus and persecuted the saints, and though he was deeply hurt by false charges and accusations made against him, did not allow these things to hinder his ministry. The apostle realized that what others thought of him didn't really matter (I Cor. 4:3,4) and that his own estimate of himself was also relatively unimportant. He knew the Lord to be his Judge and Redeemer, and therefore he was glad to give himself unstintingly to the tasks before him, serving the Lord in constant repentance.

We must always remember that we (and those whom we counsel) easily deceive ourselves. It looks humble, as well as noble, to mourn over past sins and the little that we have done for God, but in reality this is often only taking an exalted or proud view of our talents and potential, or it can also be used as an excuse to continue to do nothing. Yes, each is responsible to do his best for God and others according to his abilities and opportunities, and it is as each person fills his own small niche that great things are done and accomplished in God's Kingdom. Yet we must be aware that none of us is indispensable, and that in reality our personal contribution to the world and to the work of God's Kingdom is really quite small. When we die, life will go on without interruption or perceptible change, except perhaps for the members of our immediate family. We must realize that our relationship with God is the important thing, not the years of service that we have rendered or what we have done or have not done. When we live in fellowship with God by faith, then we will also serve Him in a spirit of unselfishness and joy. The way to real happiness and peace is through the time-proven path of faith and obedience. With faith in God the burden of guilt is lifted entirely and then we will not be burdened with regrets or plagued with sorrow, but we will be joyful and at peace in the true faith in Christ's atonement.

V. FREEDOM FROM FEAR

True happiness and peace are impossible for one who lives in constant fear. Gnawing feelings of dread and anxiety distort reality, benumb the emotions, and paralyze the will. Much of the nervous tension afflicting multitudes today can be traced to fear. The effect in some people is

extreme weariness and irritability because they are unable to rest, relax, or sleep; in others, it is the desire to sleep all the time, with the long hours of slumber failing to bring the rest which is so desperately sought. Dark thoughts concerning the future cloud the mind, work becomes drudgery, and living yields no pleasure. Often the person cannot name anything specific of which he is afraid, but his undefined feeling of fear is largely responsible for various physical symptoms which give him great distress. He suffers from indigestion, pains in the stomach, or sharp stabs in the area of the heart. He wonders if he has cancer, or if he is one of those who suddenly dies from a heart attack. He may develop throbbing headaches which make him worry about a brain tumor. He has fears about all sorts of dire developments. Yet, when he undergoes a physical examination, the doctors are unable to find anything seriously wrong. The patient is not satisfied, however, for he supposes that somehow his malady has not been discovered and so he runs from doctor to doctor and indulges in the use of all sorts of nostrums. Surely, he feels, one cannot be so exhausted or have so much pain unless something is severely wrong!

To tell this person that his troubles are mental, and that his pain and exhaustion are not real, will not solve the problem. The root of his difficulty must be uncovered. Sometimes this may require a trained psychologist or psychiatrist, but often the sufferer's deepest need is spiritual. He must find deliverance from his unrest, from his apprehension, which may be either: 1) the fear of failure, or 2) the dread of dying.

A. THE FEAR OF FAILURE. To be labeled a failure is humiliating, and most people will do all that they can to avoid it. Almost everyone wishes to be recognized and respected, and many live in continual fear that they will not be able to live up to the standards expected of them or meet the emergencies that may arise. This fear of failure involves both everyday experiences and matters relating to God and to eternity.

Earthly matters. Often people suffer from what is termed an "inferiority complex." They may have average intelligence or may be above normal, they may have a good appearance, and other plus factors, but they have no confidence in themselves. This sense of inadequacy causes them to worry about the future, wondering what they would do if the dire events they imagine were actually to take place. They are afraid that if certain loved ones were to die or if they would lose their job, they would be unable to face life and its problems.

Those who have such overriding fears of failure in earthly matters must be brought to recognize that they are being swayed by their emotions and not by the truth. Most people have adequate mental ability and intelligence, and many operate on a level lower than their ability because they choose or are called upon to use only a fraction of their potential. As far as the physically handicapped are concerned, most are able to function with relative completeness, if they have the will. There are relatively few among the handicapped who are really helpless.

The Christian will be reassured in his life as he faces earthly problems by the fact that God will never call upon him to perform a task which is beyond his ability, nor will He send a trial for which He will not give the strength. (I Cor. 10:13) The victory over the fear of failure in earthly things lies in our trust in God, trust that He will supply all our needs in the future as He has in the past, trust that He will never lay more upon us than we can bear, and trust that He will give peace and grace and strength to remain in the faith and to overcome the devil, the world and the flesh as well as all difficulties in life.

In the spiritual realm. Many believers, though well-adjusted and able to meet the problems of everyday life with poise and equanimity, are apprehensive about spiritual failure. Such are concerned that their prayer life is not satisfying, that Bible reading is a chore, that their consciousness of God's presence is practically nil, and that their spiritual influence and intelligence are negligible. They do not want to be in that condition when they die. They fear that they sometime will fall into deep sin or completely lose their faith.

To be delivered from such fears and find true happiness in life, the first consideration is to concentrate on the greatness of the salvation of Jesus Christ and the purpose for which He has saved each individual. This amounts to love for God, and, as has been said before, one cannot magically conjure up love for God. This must be developed in and under the power of the Spirit. Therefore, in the light of John's declaration that one cannot love God who is invisible if he cannot love man who is tangible (I John 4:20), the individual will have to direct his attention away from himself, and direct it to others. When one seeks, because he loves God, to do good to his fellowmen, seeks their true welfare, he will learn to love them, and he will begin to pray for them. Such unselfish prayer will bring him into communion with God, and thus the heart will grow warm toward God. Thus, in the Spirit, prayer-life will be transformed, the Bible will become a delight, God's presence will be real, the power of the devil will decline in such a life, the Old Adam will be more and more subdued, and life will be full and influential to God's glory.

There are some who are afraid of spiritual failure because they have a low view of their ability to serve God, or doubt their strength to withstand temptation. These are to remember that God knows our limitations in the spiritual area also. As with physical things, God will not lay more upon us than we can bear, and will give us the needed strength. The Lord does not look upon the lack of ability, but upon faithfulness. We must bring those whom we counsel to realize that GOD gives the ability and in such amounts as He desires and thinks good. Each is to USE what he has and never imagine that he has no ability, nor seek to excuse inaction or weakness out of fear to exercise his abilities. Many a person who has never led in public prayer, or taught a Sunday School or Bible class, or preached a sermon will receive God's rich praise at the last day. God does not rebuke because the talents which He gave are few, but only if they are not used. Also, some are prone to envision the worst possible situation, and then worry about their ability to go through it with strength and confidence. The Lord has told us: "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." (Mt. 6:34) Let the future in God's hands where it belongs, live today in His power and strength!

B. THE FEAR OF DEATH. The fear of death is common to all men ever since death became the wages of sin. Some people are able to push the thought of dying out of their minds much of the time, but every person is afraid of it. The human race dreads death and longs for life beyond the grave. True, some people declare that they have no desire to continue their existence in another world or life, but even they can say this only at certain times. They cannot think or speak like this when a loved one passes away.

The natural fear of death is evidenced in all of the religious activity of natural man. He has tried to convince himself that death is beautiful because he cannot bear the reality that he suspects in his natural knowledge. The Mohammendan thinks of death as bringing him into a beautiful harem; the Indian dreams of the happy hunting ground, the Greeks thought that through death they would come to a place where great knowledge abounded; man today, if he thinks of eternity at all, would

like to think only of some pleasant existence - with no judgment for sin. These thoughts existed or exist, simply, that because of his natural knowledge of God and the guilt in his conscience man fears death and cannot bring himself to feel really at ease in the face of death or at the thought of his own death, for the judgment is to come.

This battle continues to rage in the Christian and subsides only when and to the extent that the Christian puts himself into the hands of God and by faith is happy in forgiveness. When and to the extent that he lives in the knowledge that Christ has conquered death and that he is an heir of eternal life by faith will the fear of death diminish in the Christian.

Many unhappy people live in the grip of a paradoxical attitude toward death. They are afraid of it, and yet they long for it. Sometimes they contemplate suicide, but are restrained by the fear of what might lie beyond, or by concern for their loved ones whom they would leave behind, or by a vague feeling that suicide is evil. They are tired of living, but afraid of dying. Shakespeare expressed this inner conflict when he wrote: "To die, to sleep; to sleep; perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub; for in that sleep of death what dreams may come?"

St. Paul was aware of what he should be as a Christian and deplored the fact that his actual life was far different from that ideal. So it is with each of us in our faith, in our practical life, and in our view and thoughts of death. While we live in the flesh there is the constant struggle between the Old Man who is always with us and the New Man who so often takes his flight. We should always remember that in the lives of those whom we counsel, as in our own lives, this continual struggle will be overcome victoriously only by constantly drawing on the power of God in Word and Sacrament. For by faith the Christian should neither have a fear of death, for Christ has redeemed him from death, nor should he have a morbid longing for it. He should be able to talk about death and dying with freedom and face the fact of his own death and the deaths of his loved ones without dread, for by faith each Christian is destined to eternal life. Such faith will comfort him when grief comes in his personal losses, for God will sanctify that grief also. The Christian will be grateful for the life in Christ here on earth, he will joyously anticipate the glory of heaven, and he will be perfectly content to wait for God's time.

The fear of death is removed. The Bible teaches us that we die because sin has entered the human race, and we have therefore a natural aversion to death and dying. St. Paul sums it up saying: "The wages of sin is death." (Rom 6:23) The Word of God further declares that Jesus Christ took the sting out of death, and that those who trust in Him can be delivered from its fear. The writer to the Hebrews declared that Jesus Christ took upon Himself our humanity and sin and went to the cross "that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Heb. 2:14, 15) The Christian need not be afraid of dying, for Christ has destroyed death's power. He settled the question of the power of sin and the power of the devil by His death and resurrection.

Some people, although they know Christ and are assured of entrance into heaven, still fear "passing through the valley." They need not dread the experience of dying. People in terminal illness often appear to be suffering greatly, but in reality they are not conscious of distress. This is a medical fact which very few doctors will question. Furthermore, a sweet peace floods the soul of the believer as the hour of death approaches. This is because Jesus has paid the debt of sin and removed

the sting of death. With the reality of his faith guiding and strengthening him, the Christian will be able to overcome his natural fears of death. Certainly unhappiness and fear come to him as he remembers his sins, weaknesses and imperfections, yet his fears are removed and peace comes to him as he remembers Christ's atonement and the prospect of eternal life with God.

Thus the Christian, as he lives the new life, will not allow the inevitability of his death to be a permanent shadow over his life to rob him of happiness and peace. He will be thankful for every day of living here on earth, and will reflect often on the home that awaits him in heaven, rejoicing that the journey from earth to heaven will not be difficult, since the Lord has promised that the angels of God will attend him.

Suicide is forbidden. Every year thousands of people in hopelessness and despair commit suicide. Those who take this step have not only lost all hope, but have also lost sight of Him in whom there is hope. They have allowed fleshly concerns, fears and doubts to overcome all trust and comfort in the Lord. In some instances they may have lost control of their sanity.

It might seem like an oversimplification, but those who talk about suicide must not only be told that it is against God's will, but that it will not really solve anything. They must be told that this is a cowardly act, indicating that they are afraid to face life, and possibly too proud to come to God. It is also selfish, for it shows a lack of concern for loved ones who will be left behind. It is foolish, for it shows complete unconcern for the eternal welfare of the soul. It is also presumptuous, for the person who decides to take his own life is denying God's wisdom as to times and seasons and the length of days. Suicide overlooks the love of God to man, and His provision for living victoriously every day. God has His own plan for each person, and in it He has His own time for one to be born and to die. (Eccl. 3:1, 2) When an abortion takes place or when a birth is forced prematurely, life is destroyed before it has a chance to mature according to God's plan, and when one brings on death by his own hand he denies God's right and purpose in life, and the eternal significance of life. God has made it very clear that through suicide one cannot escape from reality, for the soul still lives, and the resurrection, and the Judgment is coming. God therefore wants us to place our lives in His hands and to live joyously in fellowship with Him until he calls us home.

We must seek to help those who are obsessed with the thought of taking their own life. Nor are we to make the mistake of thinking that one who threatens self-destruction will not go through with it. (It is true that some talk of suicide and make feeble attempts at it that often fail only to call attention to themselves and their problems, but we never know when they may be successful.) Such should be allowed to talk about their feelings, and should be given every encouragement from God's Word to go on living, to find their hope and forgiveness, their trust and strength in God.

CONCLUSION.

Each Christian will find joy and peace in all conditions in life when he is sure that God loves him and desires his happiness. No one can find happiness if he bypasses the Lord Jesus Christ, whom the Father sent to save all men, and whom the Holy Spirit brings into our hearts through the Word and Sacraments. Without Christ, life here, or in eternity, has no meaning. There is only slavery to sin, guilt before God, and a dark and hopeless eternity.

But God has not left us comfortless and alone. He has given us the assurance that in Christ He is our Father and that we are His children, that our relationship to Him is one of peace. When Christ met with His disciples in the upper room he said: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you." So that they might be sure of the remembrance of God, that they might never be ashamed out there in the world, He gave them His peace. Never does a congregation meet for worship, but at least some are there seeking true peace. And never do our Christians come to us for counselling, except to seek this peace of Christ.

We will all agree that a part of the blame for our lack of peace comes from the age in which we are living. It is certainly not easy to tell oneself that God remembers and will not allow us to be put to shame when the assaults and invasions of this unpeaceful world keep hammering away at us. More people than ever are high strung and nervously irritable and lacking in peace. That is not surprising, because the general insecurity of our age shows not only politically and economically, but also emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. The restlessness and factionalism of the world comes over into the home, into the school and church also. But the real trouble lies deeper. We need to look into our hearts and explore the causes of our own restlessness (and those whom we counsel). We cannot blame the world for the worry and fret in our hearts. The trouble is in ourselves. We lack the sense of the peace of Christ, His last and greatest gift.

Would you like to find peace? Not the peace of a lazy, sheltered life, nor the peace of the emotionless stoic who achieves "peace" by getting rid of the feeling of love and sorrow and pity in his heart, but real peace? The peace that stands guard at the gateway of the soul and confronts all manner of difficult things with steady eyes, the peace that holds the heart serene through crowded days and overwork and all the criticism of men? This is not a matter of temperament; the most high-strung soul can have it. It is a matter of accepting a gift, the peace of Christ.

What is the peace of Christ? FIRST - the peace of adequate resources. There are few things in life worse or more wearing than to face some task or problem with deficient spiritual resources. The real curse of Adam was not the work itself, but the worry and doubt of ever getting it done. The consciousness of inadequate resources can almost drive a person to distraction, give him sleepless nights, keep him perpetually strained, and weigh upon him until he is utterly miserable. But there was nothing like that with Jesus. He moved from one task to another without halting and without haste. He spent Himself without stint, but there was always more strength behind and within. Christ can and will give each of us that. He can give us adequate resources for every duty that life can lay upon us. For the fearsome responsibilities that we would like to run away from, for crowded days when the pressure of work becomes a nightmare, for the hours of crisis that take us unawares, He can give us the ability to say: "O my God, I trust in Thee." He will give us His Holy Spirit. That is the supreme resource, that is the final adequacy. To realize it is to find life and healing, and to possess it is enduring peace.

SECOND The peace of Christ was the peace of a disciplined life. We Wisconsin Synod Lutherans have been criticized for insisting upon putting into our people's hearts the adequate resources which I have just spoken about. But we have been criticized still more severely for the disciplined lives that we endeavor to build through our teachings and doctrine and "separatism." There is no peace in the world today because there is no discipline. Sooner or later we shall all have to make the discovery that slackness of any kind, whether in thought or life, is always destructive of inner repose and peace. Restlessness and unhappiness are always found in the life that functions with passing whims and purposeless drift. Whenever you meet the shining, calm face that is the radiance

of a deep inner serenity (the type of thing that we find most often in the steady eyes of our good old members) you may safely say that there has been discipline there, discipline of time, of thought, and of the heart's desire. The peace of Christ is the peace of a disciplined life and if we or anyone would retain Christ's peace, we will practice self-discipline.

The THIRD element of the peace of Christ is a clean heart. It does not matter much how difficult life is as long as the conscience is at rest. What are the real wreckers of peace? Not any of the slings and arrows of disappointed hopes, but memories that sting because of sins still unforgiven. In the remorse that echoes down the winds of passing days, "Thou are the man;" the divided loyalties that try to strike an uneasy bargain between the vision of God and the lure of the world. The breakdown of good will and love, the resentments that breed in secret, the jealousies that torture the mind, the temptations that are never seriously resisted -- these are the real destroyers of the peace of the soul. Only a clean heart by faith and repentance can bring peace.

One thing remains. -- The peace of Christ is the peace of adequate resources, of a disciplined life, and of a clean heart. And FINALLY, it is the peace of fellowship with God. This is the ultimate secret. Often when night came Jesus slipped away from the clamorous crowds. Where is He going? He is going to some lonely spot to rest His weary soul on God. At another time He steals out of the house at Bethany, long before dawn is in the sky while the village is still asleep. Where is He going? He is seeking a place to commune with His heavenly Father, and then He enters the city streets where multitudes of hurt and ailing creatures wait hopefully for His coming. He is no longer weary but traveling to meet that crowded day in the greatness of His strength. Where had He been? He had been laying that day and all its work before God in prayer and receiving help and power. That is the final secret of peace and happiness: the peace of perfect fellowship with God.

Christ says: "My peace I give unto you." Will we remember this promise? Will we make room and space in our lives for our God of peace who never forgets? Will we do what God wants us to do? Will we stop thinking that we must carry the whole burden of our work or that trying problem alone, but rather cast our burden on the Lord? It is never a waste of time to thrust aside the insistent, pressing cares, and to be still and remember God. The poise and steadiness which we will carry back to life from the secret place of the Most High will more than repay for the time "lost" in prayer. To have fellowship with God through our Lord Jesus Christ to say: "Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul; O my God, I trust in Thee, let me not be ashamed" -- that is to have found the peace which nothing in life, not all the trials and vexations of the world can ever take away.

Life may seem hard, it may deny our dreams and half-starve our hopes, but if we can say: "I am with Christ and through Christ with God," then we have found on earth the very peace of heaven. Sometimes men and women grow dubious about the values and worth of faith, but we can see its value and fibre in our work and life and in those whom we counsel. What more does the world need today than men and women who think clearly, and understand life as it really is because they have the peace of Christ?

The basis for the happy life here and for the blessed eternity with God, for a contented and secure life here and the sure and certain life in heaven is based only on and bound up in Jesus Christ, the Savior.

The trusting, humble, believing Christian will live each day of his life in peace, security and happiness if he will look at YESTERDAY as being covered by God's forgiveness, at TODAY as being blessed with God's grace and power, and at TOMORROW as being held out to him in God's promise!

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY
MEQUON, WISCONSIN 53092