

AN INVITATION TO BE DIFFERENT

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (II Corinthians 6:17-18).

Throughout the Bible you come face to face with people who are different. You meet Abraham, who quit his job and left his home in response to God's challenge: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, to the land that I will show thee." For Abraham it was a choice between the security of that which was settled and familiar and the uncertainty of the great unknown. On one side there stood a thousand safeguards for his life and happiness -- the old home, the old possessions, the old ties of kinship, and the old circle of friends. On the other side there stood a thousand risks -- and God. And because God called him, Abraham "went out, not knowing whither he went (Hebrews 11:8). Abraham made a fascinating and illustrious adventure.

In a sense, all of life is a perpetual adventure. Each new day is a bundle of unexplored potentialities. It is an adventure just to live, to go through the mysterious years, to meet life's tests and trials, its branching roads, and its opening and closing doors. Stake everything upon God and He will see you through.

In the Bible you meet Joseph, who spent thirteen years as a slave in order that he might spend the rest of his life as a king. Through all of his trying experiences Joseph remained faithful to God.

In the Scriptures you meet David, the shepherd who killed a giant and established a nation; Daniel, the prisoner of war who became a prime minister; Peter, James, and Joh, the Jewish fisherman who conquered the Roman Empire; and Paul, the brilliant rabbi who turned the world upside down.

All of these men were different. They were men whom God used to make the world different. They will make a difference in your life, if only you will learn from them the secret of their power and influence.

These men lived at different times in history and belonged to different social levels; but they all had one thing in common, namely, they allowed God to work in them in order that He might work through them. They permitted God to take time to work in their lives, regardless of the cost. Because God was permitted to work in them, He was pleased to work through them.

God called Abraham and promised him a son, and then spent the next twenty-five years preparing Abraham for the birth of that son. God promised Joseph that he would be a king, and then He used thirteen years to prepare and to equip him for his great ministry. Christ called His apostles and schooled them for three years before sending them out as His representatives to a lost world. Even the Apostle Paul, who was trained in the finest schools of his day, had to spend three more years in Arabia to prepare himself for his life's work.

The principle is quite obvious: God must work in us before He can work through us. Paul expressed it in this way: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always

not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13). The trouble with most of us is that we try to work out something that God has never worked in our hearts and lives. We act in self-will, depending on our own energy and wisdom, which always leads us to frustration and failure. The Christian life becomes a burden, and Christian service a chore, when we depend on ourselves instead of the Lord. There may be a semblance of blessing and victory in our lives, but the whole thing is really shallow and empty; and before long our work falls to pieces. So many are self-motivated and self-activated. What a difference it makes when one allows the Holy Spirit to work in and through him! As one confessed, "I used to be like our car; I'd get all filled up and keep on going until the fuel ran out. Now I've learned to draw constantly on His power -- and things are different."

The great tragedy in Samson's life was that he became "like any other man" (Judges 16:17). Up to the time of his failure, he had been a man who was different; but when he lost his strength he lost that difference. He became ordinary.

God's emphatic call to Christians is to "come out from among them," and to be different. Children of God are to be different from those who are not. They must be different in their motives and in their objectives. A profession is one thing, but a life is another. A life of devoted service to God is the most needed thing. Observing the inconsistencies of the life of one who was loud in his profession led Burns to say, "What you are sounds so loud I cannot hear what you say." Christianity is not a mere Sunday affair. One is not worth any more as a Christian on Sunday than he is worth on the other six days of the week. One's religion is not respected any more in church on Sunday than it is in the store, the shop, the office, or the farm on the week days. One's name is not worth any more on the church roll than it is on the merchant's ledger.

Not only is there a call to be heeded, but there is also a command to be obeyed -- "Be ye separate." In the beginning God "divided the light from the darkness," but ever since the fall man has been trying to blend them. He has been trying to blend the carnal and the spiritual, and the works of the flesh with those of the Spirit. So long as you are in sympathy with evil and evildoers, you are degrading yourself, imperilling your best interests, and incurring the displeasure of God. The measure of your discord with the world is the extent of your accord with Christ. A Christian should be separated from what the Lord disapproves and attached to what He approves. The closer you live to the Lord the farther you will be from the sinful practices of men.

The words "work in" and "work out" spell the difference between an ordinary and an extraordinary Christian life. There are three works that God wants to perform in your life:

I. The Work God Does For You: Salvation.

Paul is not suggesting that you work for your salvation, because salvation or eternal life is a gift and cannot be earned. Here is how the Bible explains it: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his

workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10).

God worked for us on the cross when Christ died for our sins. That work is finished. The very moment you trust Christ as your Saviour, His finished work on the cross is applied to you, and you become a child of God. All of this is by grace. You do not deserve to be saved, and you cannot save yourself.

Salvation is the biggest thing in the world. It is encouraging to know what salvation is of the Lord. It commences with Him, continues in Him, and consummates in Him. He is one who puts the desire for it in our hearts, and causes us to want to be saved.

II. The Work God Does In You: Sanctification.

Salvation is not the end of the Christian life; it is the beginning. The next step, after Christ saves, is to allow God to work in you, to make you "His workmanship" (literally, "His manufactured product"), for His glory. This process of inner working we call sanctification or being "set apart" for special use in God's service. "For it is God who worketh in you." "Working in you" literally means "to communicate the energy," or "to put into operation." God energizes the will. He gives the suggestion, the impulse, the inclination, the desire, and even the strength and ability to carry out the impulse. God is the One Who creates every desire for a better life. He works in the soul of the believer the will to love others, to abstain from evil, to be devoted to Christ, to discover God's will, and to live above reproach. If we have any holy thoughts, God gives them to us. If we have any great desire for righteousness, it comes from Him. He creates in us the longing to do His will, when we decide to turn the desire into the deed, the power of God is there also. God worketh in you the inspiration, the assistance, the power, and the grace.

III. The Work God Does Through You: Service.

Why does God work in us? He does in order that He may work through us. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." What a thrilling thing it is to be a Christian! What a challenge it is to know that God is preparing us for what He is preparing for us; that the future is not dark and dangerous, but filled with the things God has already prepared. Paul's statement in I Corinthians 2:9: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him," applies to the here-and-now as well as it does to the hereafter. No matter how disappointing your past may have been, nor how depressing your present, God has prepared for you an unbelievable future. You can truly enjoy that future, if you will only allow God to work in and through you.

Why is it that God prefers to operate this way? Why must God work in us before He can work through us?

One reason is that God is more concerned with what you are than with what you do. The worker is always more important than the work. If one's character is what it ought to be, then his conduct will be what it ought to be. Moses, for example, was a gifted and educated man, but when he was forty years of age he was not yet ready to lead Israel out of Egypt. He tried to solve the problems of his nation with his own strength, and the result was a dismal failure. God had to put Moses in the wilderness for another forty years, and there He worked in him to prepare him for his great ministry. Could God have corrected Moses' mistakes and delivered Israel the first time? Yes, but Moses would not have been the man of God that he became. God could have elevated Joseph to the throne of Egypt when he was yet a teen-ager, but Joseph would not have been the man of character that he became at the age of thirty. God is concerned with character; you are His workmanship, and He wants to work in and through you for His glory and for the benefit of others.

A second reason for God's patient dealing with us is that Satan works the same way. In Ephesians 2:2 Satan is called "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." Satan works in us to make us disobedient to God, and God works in us to make us obedient. When Peter argued with Christ and tried to turn Him away from the cross, Christ replied: "Get thee behind me, Satan" (Matthew 16:23). It was Satan who was using the tongue of Simon Peter to oppose the will of God. And it was Satan who used Judas, and Ananias, and Sapphira; and he will use you and me if we allow him to do so. The only way to counteract the work of Satan in your life is to let God work there.

Perhaps the most important reason for God's working slowly in us is that He wants to make us more like Christ. God wants us to be "conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29). After all, the more we are like Christ, the more we will be able to obey the teachings of God's Word and accomplish His will. The world tries to get us to conform to its ways, but God wants to work within us and make us like Christ. To be sure, every believer will be like Christ when He returns, but today we can start to become more like Him as we allow God to work in our lives.

The Christian calling is God's invitation for you to be different. If you are one of His children, then you have experienced His work for you, but this is not enough. God wants you to enjoy His work in your, in order that you may experience His work through you. God will not change His method. He has already prepared those "good works" that will enrich and expand your life, and now He wants to prepare you, to work in your, that you may be able to walk in those blessings and let Him work through you.