

CONTENTS

Foreword	7
1. The Report of the Watcher	9
2. We Must Have Better Christians	13
3. We Need Men of God Again	17
4. New Spiritual Leadership Imperative	21
5. The Gift of Prophetic Insight	25
6. The Prophet Is a Man Apart	29
7. Exposition Must Have Application	31
8. Christ's Words Are for Christians	35
9. The First Obligation of the Church	39
10. The Cross Does Interfere	43
11. Each His Own Cross	47
12. Holiness before Happiness	51
13. The Need for Self-Judgment	55
14. Prayer: No Substitute for Obedience	59
15. Not All Faith Pleases God	63
16. Religion Should Produce Action	67
17. A New Man in an Old World	71
18. Spiritual Symmetry Is God's Will for Us	75
19. Candling Eggs or Feeding Sheep?	79
20. Beware the File-Card Mentality	83
21. The Evils of a Bad Disposition	87
22. Books and Moral Standards	91
23. The Use and Abuse of Humor	95
24. On Calling Our Brother a Fool	99
25. Magic: No Part of the Christian Faith	103
26. No Christian Should Feel Resentment	107

27. Beware the Vexed Spirit	111
28. On Backing into Our Convictions	115
29. We Can Be Delivered from Carnal Fear	119
30. Learning to Live with Our Problems	123
31. Let's Cultivate Simplicity and Solitude	127
32. The Christian Is the True Realist	133
33. On to El-beth-el!	137
34. Through God to Nature	141
35. The Bible World Is the Real World	145
36. The God of Grace Is the God of Nature	149
37. God's Work Can Stand Inspection	153
38. Praise in Three Dimensions	157
39. The World to Come	161
40. Maranatha! Glad Day!	165

The Report of the Watcher

Were some watcher or holy one from the bright world above to come among us for a time with the power to diagnose the spiritual ills of church people, there is one entry which I am quite sure would appear on the vast majority of his reports: *Definite evidence of chronic spiritual lassitude; level of moral enthusiasm extremely low.*

What makes this condition especially significant is that Americans are not naturally an unenthusiastic people. Indeed they have a worldwide reputation for being just the opposite. Visitors to our shores from other countries never cease to marvel at the vigor and energy with which we attack our problems. We live at a fever pitch, and whether we are erecting buildings, laying highways, promoting athletic events, celebrating special days, or welcoming returning heroes, we always do it with an exaggerated flourish. Our building will be taller, our highway broader, our athletic contest more colorful, our

celebration more elaborate and more expensive than would be true anywhere else on earth. We walk faster, drive faster, earn more, spend more, and run a higher blood pressure than any other people in the world.

In only one field of human interest are we slow and apathetic: that is the field of personal religion. There for some strange reason our enthusiasm lags. Church people habitually approach the matter of their personal relation to God in a dull, halfhearted way which is altogether out of keeping with their general temperament and wholly inconsistent with the importance of the subject.

It is true that there is a lot of religious activity among us: interchurch basketball tournaments, religious splash parties followed by devotions, weekend camping trips with a Bible quiz around the fire. Sunday school picnics, building fund drives, and ministerial breakfasts are with us in unbelievable numbers, and they are carried on with typical American gusto. It is when we enter the sacred precincts of the heart's personal religion that we suddenly lose all enthusiasm.

So we find this strange and contradictory situation: a world of noisy, headlong religious activity carried on without moral energy or spiritual fervor. In a year's travel among the churches, one scarcely finds a believer whose blood count is normal and whose temperature is up to standard. The flush and excitement of the soul in love must be sought in the New Testament or in the biographies of the saints; we look for them in vain among the

professed followers of Christ in our day.

Now if there is any reality within the whole sphere of human experience that is by its very nature worthy to challenge the mind, charm the heart, and bring the total life to a burning focus, it is the reality that revolves around the Person of Christ. If He is who and what the Christian message declares Him to be, then the thought of Him should be the most exciting, the most stimulating, to enter the human mind. It is not hard to understand how Paul could join wine and the Spirit in one verse: "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). When the Spirit presents Christ to our inner vision, it has an exhilarating effect on the soul much as wine has on the body. The Spirit-filled man may literally dwell in a state of spiritual fervor amounting to a mild and pure inebriation.

God dwells in a state of perpetual enthusiasm. He is delighted with all that is good and lovingly concerned about all that is wrong. He pursues His labors always in a fullness of holy zeal. No wonder the Spirit came at Pentecost as the sound of a rushing mighty wind and sat in tongues of fire on every forehead. In so doing He was acting as one of the Persons of the blessed Godhead.

Whatever else happened at Pentecost, one thing that cannot be missed by the most casual observer was the sudden upsurging of moral enthusiasm. Those first disciples burned with a steady, inward fire. They were enthusiastic to the point of complete abandon.

Dante, on his imaginary journey through hell, came upon a group of lost souls who sighed and moaned continually as they whirled about aimlessly in the dusky air. Virgil, his guide, explained that these were the “wretched people,” the “nearly soulless,” who while they lived on earth had not moral energy enough to be either good or evil. They had earned neither praise nor blame. And with them, sharing in their punishment, were those angels who would take sides neither with God nor Satan. The doom of all of the weak and irresolute crew was to be suspended forever between a hell that despised them and a heaven that would not receive their defiled presence. Not even their names were to be mentioned again in heaven or earth or hell. “Look,” said the guide, “and pass on.”

Was Dante saying in his own way what our Lord had said long before to the church of Laodicea: “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:15–16)?

The low level of moral enthusiasm among us may have a significance far deeper than we are willing to believe.