

"None of Us Lives to Himself"

~ Romans 14:7 "None of us lives to himself."

This scripture puts all Christian work into true perspective. When we consider Christian work, it is easy to focus on how everything "out there" is going. It is easy for us to look at the Lord's work as something we manage --like a stock portfolio, or as an air traffic controller might manage airplanes. This scripture brings us all back to ourselves; it answers the question, "How is the Lord's work going?" with the question, "How are you going." It tells each of us that the Lord's work lives with me. For the Lord's work to succeed, you must be the kind of person that can connect with, work with, and "get along" with other people. That is a sobering consideration. "We are laborers together." Together. Perhaps, there has never been a time when we were more aware of the fact that we are in this together.



*Selfish people
end up having
only their self*

"None of us lives to himself." This scripture doesn't focus on the other guy. This scripture asks each of us: "How successful are you at forgiving those who spitefully use you and persecute you?" "How successful are you in getting along in the wider world?" "How successful are you at overcoming your own ego in order to connect with and become a witness to others around you?" How successful are you at overcoming your own prejudice to accept and understand those who are different? These have always been the tough questions of Christianity. This scripture reminds us that we are part of a world that includes other people. This scripture reminds us that there are other planes using the same runway. Without due consideration for others, we set ourselves and everyone else up for accident. "None of us lives to himself." That includes nations. I like what Mark Twain said, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and small mindedness." To be a good citizen or a good Christian you must consider others.

As Jesus was about ready to leave the earth to go to the right hand of the Father to make intercession for each of us he said, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). It is important to see the difference between a Christian witness and a witness that might be called to testify in a trial --a witness who is called into court gives evidence. He is there in the witness box simply to say what he saw and what he heard. Yet, what he heard or saw may not in the slightest affect him personally. But as a witness for Jesus, a witness is *what we are*. We're not just bearing witness, we are witnesses. What we are is a message in itself -or not, or not.

Let me say it another way. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world." That means that we're not just going to carry the light, but that we are going to be the light. It is a lot easier to carry the light than to be the light. With the Christian witness, it is what we are that makes us a witness. I will say it even another

way, "There are always folk witnessing, who are not witnesses."

This leads us to the second step of being a witness --that is Jerusalem. Jerusalem is, of course, where they lived. You cannot fool the people with whom you live. You don't live there alone. In addition, Christ "commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father. `This,' he said, `is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:4,5).

You must be a Christian witness at home before you can be one anywhere else. The test of our genuineness and authenticity is always, how well are we doing where we live? For, we live there with other people. It is an easy thing to go where they don't know us. While we may witness to strangers, we can only *be witnesses* to those who know us. It is important that the work of the Spirit within be apparent to the people with whom we live --the people of Jerusalem and Judea. Your Christian witness may eventually reach the end of the earth, but it must begin at home with your family, your work, your school, your town. If you cannot be a Christian witness in these places, transporting you to a distant land will not make you one. Home, is the truest test of genuineness.

Our Christian witness is inevitable. It is impossible for us to confess our faith in Jesus Christ and not be a witness of some kind. Paul wrote, "And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it (There is a funny kind of witness --"no need to speak about it"). For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:6-9). Welcoming, turning, serving.

Our witness either has this kind of effect on the lives of others, or the other kind of effect. As others watch us, they see Christ as either good to follow or not. This ought to be ample encouragement for us to be careful --to check that list of modern idols. It cannot be overstated how much the faith of our own families, friends, and community depends upon this kind of living, breathing witness that renders actual service to a living and true God. It cannot be overstated that they can see our value system --our idols. As the Apostle put it in his second letter to the Corinthians, "And he died for all, that those who live might *live no longer for themselves*, but for him who, for their sake, died and was raised" (2 Corinthians 5:15).

We are witnesses because we live unto Christ. And I will say it again, "No man lives unto himself." You cannot be a vital Christian all by yourself. Your Christianity is interwoven with others, and that is a serious consideration. We have to think about the complex nature of life to realize how dependent we are upon others for everything. Our food is grown by other people, processed and packaged by other people, and transported to us by other people. Factories are energized, mail is carried, clothing is manufactured by a vast and intricate system of purposely arranged cooperation of other people.

To trace the process through which any commodity travels from its origin to its actual use is to learn lessons in geography, history, mechanics, chemistry, biology, economics --and above all, it is to learn the lesson of our interdependence with other people. "No one lives unto himself."

Thus, the truth that "no one lives to himself" is propounded to the Romans, and to those who are in the church of Jesus Christ. Paul is asking them to appreciate this working principle in a particular Christian context. He is saying, "Those of you who are in Christ, must in all things remember that *you* do not live to yourselves." Selfishness is not a Christian commodity.

Before we look farther at this truth, let's first of all deal with the opposite of this truth. After all, there is a sense in which the Christian does live to himself. Paul wrote, "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean to any one (any individual) who *thinks* it unclean" (Romans 14:14). Vegetarianism is not a new thing. It is to our own hearts that we pay attention first. Paul is saying, "It is wrong for me to do something if I think it is wrong --even if you don't." There is, therefore, this sense in which Paul says that *each may live to himself*, and no one has the right to pass judgment upon the conscience of another. It is what we call, "freedom of conscience."

He explains it this way: There are those who believe they please God more because they eat only vegetables (Romans 14:2). Yet, this narrowness must not be imposed upon all. It is not part of the Christian mission message. "Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand" (Romans 14:3,4). "God has welcomed them" --perhaps we need to follow. I have vegetarian friends --I greatly admire them; but, I'm not a vegetarian --and they don't expect me to become one.

So, there is a sense in which we do live to ourselves, but let's get back to the other side of the coin, "No man lives unto himself." For example, as Christians, we are members of a community of Christians, and not everyone in that community has grown to the same extent. Even as we look at ourselves, we should hope that we are farther along in our Christian graces and our faith journey than we once were. We should also hope that we may continue to travel --But what we do know is that we are not there yet, and that few of us are at the same place on the interstate highway to heaven. The church of Jesus Christ, in this regard, is like the society in which we live --and there is always the weaker brother. We must help him; it will do little good to harshly judge him for being where we, ourselves, were several years ago. We must have patience.

Because we do not live unto ourselves, we need to be gentle with others who may not yet see with the clarity we may profess. "All things are lawful, but all things are not beneficial. All things are lawful, but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other" (1 Corinthians 10:23). You may be able to jump on a moving bus, but a child may not be able to do that. A convoy doesn't move at the speed of the destroyers; it moves at the speed of the cargo carrier --defenseless and slower. In

the church we accommodate, and protect, and make allowances for the various growing Christians. We do not condemn them because they are not destroyers moving across the sea at 40 nautical miles an hour in the fleet or Christian acrobats. Thank God for Christians who welcome and give space to other growing Christians. They may never get to where you are, but if they have gotten to Christ, they will catch up when he comes.

I did not see Christ as clearly when I first entered my Christian journey; nor do I see him as clearly as I hope I shall in another ten years. We do not throw away people just because their faith journey is in process, rather than completed. What we do know is that "Now we all see through a glass darkly, but then we shall see him face to face." We shall one day see him with all clearness, but now we must see him with our ever growing faith.

There is a second destination of our witness that goes beyond where we live. Our witness must include others who are not like us. Our witness must go to Samaria. If we cannot get to Samaria, we can never expect to get to the end of the earth. Again, it is what we ourselves are that keeps us out of Samaria. Human prejudice and Christian witness make a poor combination. Our own prejudice will keep us from others. Remember the woman at the well? She had to ask Jesus, "Why do you bother with me a *woman of Samaria*, for the Jews have no dealing with the Samaritans?" What was so remarkable about the "good Samaritan?" It was not just that he stopped to help the wounded man, but that he overcame his prejudice to do so. He was, after all, a Samaritan. Discrimination and prejudice can keep the gospel from getting to the end of the earth. To get there we must all go through Samaria. There is no shortcut. To *be witnesses*, we must allow God to heal us from prejudice and discrimination. You cannot be a witness to someone if you have your foot on his or her head. You cannot be a witness to them if you think you are better than they are.

The important thing is to keep the whole convoy moving. There is an old story of a highly skilled mountain climber who intimidated others with his agility. As he led a group of youngsters up the mountainside, the rocks came rolling down upon them. Finally, the experienced climber stopped dead in his tracks when he heard the urgent voice of a youngster cry out, "Be careful sir, we're coming up behind you." We must hold hands with all the Christians that we can, and climb Mount Zion together.

"No man lives unto himself."

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father,

This is such a time where there is no quarrel with these words. What we do, does indeed, affect other people. "Help us to live for others, that we may live like Thee."

In the name of our Christ Jesus, Amen