



I am not the man I ought to be, I am not the man I wish to be, and I am not the man I note be; but by the Grace of God, I am not the man I used to be. (Rev Captain John Newton 1725-1807)

1 For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; 2 That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; 3 In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. 5 For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. 6 As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: 7 Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. 8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. 9 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. 10 And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: 11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: 12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. (Col 2:1-12)

THE MINISTER'S CONCERN: Please note the extraordinary example Paul sets for us as Christians and as ministers. He prays and suffers pain for those to whom he directly ministers – the Laodiceans – also for those whom he has not seen, and many whom he SHALL never see. These latter, friends, would be you and me. What broad compassion and love Paul, once a persecutor of the church and now its minister, has for the WHOLE Church – past, present, and future. He doubtlessly looks back with abject contrition on the sins for which he has, by Grace, been forgiven. *“For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh.”*

Once struck down by that brilliant Light on the Road to Damascus, Paul never returns to his old profession of seeking out and destroying the people of God. In times past, Paul was a scourge to the believers; now he is a co-laborer with them. Is it not amazing that God can take an avenger and turn him into a comforter in an instant? What of that depraved old sea captain, John Newton, who dealt in the slave trade and

treated both slave and crew so harshly that all hated him. He used vulgar and obscene language, and was drunk more often than sober. Yet, God turned John around one night when he met him in a storm that threatened to seek the vessel upon which he was a passenger.

John prayed in the hull of that ship for the first time since the passing of his dear Christian mother at age 9. God saved John Newton in more ways than one. His crippled vessel wobbled into port in England, her mast broken and her sails torn to shreds. John became one of the greatest ministers in England and later wrote a book of hymns, the Olney Hymns. His most well-beloved hymn is Amazing Grace, for that was what saved John Newton, and that is what changed Paul. As Jesus said of the repentant woman who bathed his feet with her tears: *“Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.”* (Luke 7:47) Paul’s zeal was nourished by the bottled tears he owned before Christ met him, by His Providence, on a dusty old Damascan Road.

CONCERNS OF THE CHURCH: *“That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”* The Lord we serve epitomizes love. We cannot love Him unless he has loved us first. Love unites in purpose, will, and action. Families stay together because of love. In the past, a father and mother would sacrifice their health and plenty for their children. The child does not know such a sacrificial spirit. The parent ALWAYS sacrifices more for the child than vice versa. God has sacrificed all for us. What have we given up for Him? Of course, greater love in times of a barren harvest will grow and overflow. We are comforted by our love for God and for His people. Our labors for one another, just as parents for a child, seem as nothing compared to that increasing benefit of love that is our wage. Love will also result in greater understanding and knowledge of the object of that Love. The Church, stayed on Christ, will seek Him out on every mountain, and every dune of the desert. Those great mountains and dunes are presented to us in the Holy Bible. Do we care enough to read of Him daily?

All who know the Triune God will readily admit to the glorious mysteries that are both revealed and hidden from their eyes. No man knows all of the mysteries of God for He has not seen fit to yet reveal all knowledge even to His Elect. Knowing God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost forces an acknowledgement of mysteries beyond frail man to comprehend. Who designed and placed on the wing the great eagle, or drew the boundaries for the tides of the sea, or the precise and continual movement of the heavenly bodies in their orbits? There is Trinity in all things. Ask me and I shall prove it. In this Triune God are hidden the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. The Christian cannot gain a great estate of that knowledge through the process of osmosis – he must actively pursue wisdom and knowledge through the pages of Scripture, and even of God’s natural laws as well. The Church has work to do, but it also has mysteries to learn.

FALSE TEACHING: *“And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.”* If we learn well enough that which is true, the counterfeit lies of Satan will not deceive us. There are two kinds of knowledge – of good and evil. Of course, a third might be labeled nonsense. When asked if he thought liberals were stupid, President Reagan responded, “Oh, I don’t say that the liberals are stupid. It is just that they know so very much that isn’t so!” There are a lot of ministers and Christians today that would prefer to study sensational, spiritual books to the detriment of their Bible studies. Quite often

those books contain a look of spiritual knowledge *“that simply isn’t so.”* Many young ministers start out with a heart on fire to preach the fullness of the Gospel. They have a full faith and knowledge of the Lord and all that He has done for them. They desire to share that good news. So they attend seminary. At seminary, they learn of ‘conflict resolution’, of ‘office administration’, of ‘how to GROW the church using questionable means’, of ‘philosophy that calls into question faith itself’....you get the message. There is little taught of biblical and historic Christianity. The Bible is taught from a standpoint of questioning its veracity. If he has not already been deceived by his pastor prior to seminary, a seminarian will be taught there to abandon the ancient and biblical texts given by God to the prophets that were so well-beloved by his fathers for an inferior and sterile new and copyrighted text – NIV, NASB, RSV, ESV, etc – that attacks at every opportunity the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ and, today, incorporates the politically popular accents of the world. Be not deceived, Christ warned us in the last days, MANY (not a few) false prophets would emerge deceiving many. These false prophets are not all Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, Universalist, and so forth. Many are Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, and every other stripe that places denominational institutionalism above the Sovereignty of God. John Wesley once had a dream in which he said he died and went to heaven. Happily arriving at the Pearly Gates, he was welcomed by St. Peter. He asked St. Peter, “Are there any Methodists up here?” to which St. Peter replied, “No.” Wesley asked, “Are there any Baptists up here?” to which St. Peter again responded in the negative. He got the same response to his entreaties about Presbyterians, Anglicans, and others. Finally, Wesley inquired, “Well, sir, WHO is in Heaven.” St. Peter responded, “The only ones admitted here are CHRISTIANS!” Are we Christians, or are we Baptists, Methodists, Anglicans, etc?

A mature and seasoned soldier will be disciplined and conduct his duties in an orderly fashion. So will the disciplined and knowledgeable Christian. No false teaching can diverted him from his course.

FALSE PHILOSOPHY AND ASTROLOGY: *“Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”* The true Christian avoids extraneous conversation with the world. He neither walks, stands, nor makes himself comfortable with the unrighteous. He is rather as a tree, planted by the Rivers of Water. *“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”* (Psalms 1:1-3)

False philosophy is presented in the public schools, in books and novels claiming high spiritual experiences, in the praise of the mythology of Greece and Rome, and in the humanism that underlies every dictatorial power. False philosophy enslaves, but the Gospel of Christ liberates! The undue emphasis of tradition, even in the face of conflict with the Word of God, claiming perfection in person and not God, and welcoming the wickedness of the world into the doors of the church by way of immoral music, lifestyles, and teachings that are not consistent with Scripture – these are the termites and maggots that undermine the foundation of the church – that is, unfaithful, Laodicean churches, but not the Church of God.

THE ANTIDOTE TO THE WORLD’S POISON: How often have I heard among soldiers, hung over from a weekend of excess and drunkenness, say on Monday morning, “What I need is some of the hair from the dog that bit me.” That means they need another drink of alcohol to take away the grog of their hangover. In a sense, that is

true for the Christian, but in a different way. “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.” Jesus Christ took upon Himself, being without the least blot of sin, our own sins on the cross at Calvary. When the sinner looks in faith to the cross, He will be saved. **“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: 15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”** (John 3:14-15) Christ conquered the sin represented by the brazen serpent, and the great proponent of sin, Satan himself, on the cross. Christ is our antidote for the deadly sins we bear. We have the tainted and sinful blood Adam in our veins that leads to certain death. We need a blood transfusion of the pure blood of Christ to heal us.

THE CURE APPLIED: “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.” We are washed by the blood of Christ from our sins and we symbolically bury the old sinful nature, and take up an altogether new nature in Christ. He died, and was buried, for our sins. We, too, in receiving Christ are privileged, through His sacrificial death and resurrection, to die and bury our sins, and rise with Him in the newness of life. God will not leave us in Hell just as He would not leave our fathers in Goshen of Egypt. He is a Father that always comes for His own. Are you His own?