

THE FUTURE OUTLOOK

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MY FELLOW AMERICANS: MERRY CHRISTMAS

By B. HERBIN

There's a great deal of talk about the Vietnam War, where we Americans are concerned. Recently, announcements have gone out to march for PEACE there, in order that our soldiers, sailors, marines and Air-men may come home — the brave ones still fighting in light of those who have given already the SUPREME SACRIFICE. Moratoriums have been held throughout the Nation in this interest of patriotism and love for our fighting forces. There, I doubt, are any of us who wish this war to continue; and none loves peace more than I.

Hence, I pray for tranquility and happiness for all mankind in every corner of the globe; I, too, wish the war would cease. However, I am thinking that the wars on our own soil, in our own land is just as detrimental to domestic tranquility for Americans, here at home, as it is for those Americans who fight on foreign soil.

Recently, The Greensboro Daily News carried an editorial from one Soldier in Vietnam who stated his disappointment in American support for our position in the Vietnam crisis. He expressed disagreement with the moratorium saying that he, among other Americans, understands the purpose of their being there, and that they will stay there to see "it" through. It is right for us to sing . . . "The home of the brave." "The land of the free?" — Well, when citizens are led to live in fear because they dare speak out on issues closer to home, then our freedoms are denied. Not by Vietnamese, not by Germans, not by any other nation of people: these freedoms are ostracized by our own people.

Sure it's right and proper for "moderate, patriotic, responsible citizens to remain no longer silent; needful is it to "put THE PRINCE OF PEACE back into CHRISTMAS," by joining in the sentiments of BROTHERHOOD, but this can never be done — not merely by the stoppage of the war in Vietnam; not really by the dominance of one race over another, nor by class against class. CHRIST can not live in a declining society where the color of HIS skin becomes a fighting factor, or where selfishness, fear and sin trample HIS HOLINESS in the dust. The PRINCE OF PEACE will ride around the outskirts of this City and this Nation unless those who cry loudest for His coming, first let HIM in their hearts and into their lives.

How can we expect THE GRACES OF HIS COMPANY as long as we fight each other in our land? I almost understand the fight in Vietnam, but the war between Americans themselves, I cannot comprehend.

We cannot stop the war in Vietnam; can we stop the one at home? It, indeed, would be a wonderful experience to not only dream of the Christmas we use to know; it would be a Blessing to have in reality a Christmas of PEACE AND JOY here at home. I know the boys in Vietnam would like that too, and have a reason to look Homeward to the days when they, too, shall return, not to a battle field as they now live each day, but return to God's greatest gift to us, and ours to them — The America of domestic tranquility — a never ending Christmas of happiness, peace and joy for all.

THIS WEEK'S SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON**THE DEMANDS OF THE COMMITTED LIFE**
Searching The Scriptures

The Scripture for this lesson is Matthew 19:16-22; Luke 9:57-62; John 15:12-20; 1 Peter 3:13-17. Selected verses are printed below.

John 15:18-20

18 "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also."

1 Peter 3:13-17

13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is right? 14 But even if you do suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 15 but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence; 16 and keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 17 For it is better to suffer for doing right, if that should be God's will, than for doing wrong.

Memory Selection: It is better to suffer for doing right, if that should be God's will, than for doing wrong. —1 Peter 3:17

Exploring The Questions

The subject of this lesson is commitment, and that is the title of the first chapter of a book I want to commend to you. It is called *Disciplines of the Spirit*, by Howard Thurman. Thurman discusses tough questions about personal commitment in modern life.

Both Scripture passages printed in this lesson talk about accepting responsibility for one's beliefs and actions in the midst of adverse conditions.

We will need to ask the usual questions regarding the Scripture: who, what, when, where, why. In this case I think "when" may be the key question. Both passages refer to persecution; both passages make indirect references to the society of the times. Filling in the historical background will help make these passages come to life.

In these two selections of Scripture we need to take note of the larger context. The writer of John, in organizing his material, grouped Chapters 13 thru 17 together in what has come to be known as the "farewell

discourse." In them he recalls Jesus' last day with his disciples and his teachings concerning what they should expect after he is gone.

In First Peter the author discusses the obligations of Christians toward one another and their society in a time of danger and suffering. The verses preceding those printed in this lesson give advice on proper behavior for slaves and wives and husbands. With verse 13 he enlarges the scope of his message to include all social relationships. We will need to explore the reasoning behind his submissive attitude in all these areas.

Finding Help With Your Questions

William Barclay points out that the Gospel of John always pictures life in terms of opposites. The world and the Christian community provide one such contrast. The author believed these two were unavoidably set against each other.

Barclay goes on to point out that by the time this Gospel was written, the church had suffered successive waves of persecution and Christianity was illegal. But the passage we are studying makes it clear that no one could say he had not been warned!

Who wrote this Gospel? Scholars generally agree that the book was not written until about A.D. 100, so the work could hardly have been that of one of the original disciples. Apparently what we have in this Gospel is a record of John's preaching, recorded by one of his disciples, much as we have Peter's sermons in Mark.

One With the Master

The discussion of the vine, which precedes the verses printed here, describes the vital union between Jesus and his disciples, on which the future of the new fellowship rests.

But verses 18-20 introduce a somber note. The price of discipleship is high. Those who hate Jesus will also hate his followers. "World" in verse 19 means human society as it organizes itself apart from God. The disciples are not of the world, that is, they are not morally identified with it. Thus they, too, will be hated.

Reminding the disciples that a servant is not greater than his master (and so cannot expect better treatment), Jesus suggests that they can expect persecution from those who have rejected his word. They will also get a positive response from those who have accepted Jesus' word.

Faithfulness Under Fire
With First Peter also we must question whether it was penned by the famous disciple

whose name it bears. Certainly it seems to contain Peter's thoughts. But it is written in excellent Greek, and certain verses seem to reflect some of Paul's ideas. Therefore scholars believe it was actually written down by someone else, probably Silvanus (5:12), the missionary companion of Paul.

The purpose of the letter was to give encouragement to Christians in the northern part of Asia Minor (1:1) after the outbreak of Nero's persecution in A.D. 64. The writer encouraged tolerance toward the social order because of his belief that the end of the world was near. (4:7) As we can see in these verses, Christians were encouraged to prove the genuineness of their faith by being good citizens in the midst of adversity. (3:16)

Bo Reicke has pointed out: "The emphasis of the authors on co-operation with secular authority should not be interpreted as appeasement but as an attitude of unconcern for the values of this world in light of its imminent destruction and the coming of the reign of God."

The original Greek wording in verse 15b suggests a rational and intelligent explanation. Their "hope," obviously, is another reference to the belief that Christ would return soon and deliver them from their evil surroundings.

Committed Christian Living

Most Christians now believe that we must do more than merely endure the world; we must live creatively in it. That is, we must strive to transform every situation and every relationship in the light of our faith and the teachings of Jesus Christ.

To do so consistently involves commitment, which is our lesson topic. Howard Thurman says: "Commitment means that it is possible for a man to yield the nerve center of his consent to a purpose or cause, a movement or an ideal, which may be more important to him than whether he lives or dies."

In Christianity the focus is simple: Surrender your inner consent to God. No exception is permissible.

It sounds simple, but how many of us are ready to give our lives to something or someone other than ourselves? Here is the problem: "We are fearful that we shall be asked to do what in the light of our accepted behavior patterns is out of character for us or far too difficult. . . . There is an uneasy feeling that if we surrender our will to God, what He will require of us may be utter sacrifice."

The escape for most of us is
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