
Taking Hold of Christ

By David Wilkerson

June 1, 1987 I am convinced that many who call themselves Christians are not going to endure to the end. It has been proclaimed that the love of many will grow cold and die because of explosive wickedness. Others will turn away from the truth and run after false teachers and prophets who will cater to their selfish lusts and deceive them. There will be those seduced by doctrines of demons who will become spiritually blind and end up given over to reprobate minds.

If Jeremiah the prophet were living today, he would be aghast at the sight of so many lukewarm, sin-loving, two timing Christians - living so carelessly at the very end of time. He would weep; he would mourn; and he would cry out, "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" (Jeremiah 12:5).

The prophet's message is "Up to now, it's just been a foot race but now the horsemen of the Apocalypse are coming. If you are weary and careless in a time of peace and prosperity, if you can't walk with God when there is no persecution, what are you going to do when the satanic flood of sin and persecution comes rolling in?"

I thank God for what we are hearing from so many who respond to our written messages. Hunger for God is growing; there are wonderful testimonies of how the Spirit of God is awakening seekers to a walk of holiness; there is a great increase of spiritual discernment; many are forsaking idols, dead churches and false teachings. We marvel at the tremendous changes we have seen just in the past year, as so many write to tell us how the Lord is bringing them through refining fires. Among them are numbers of ministers of all faiths who are ridding their lives of sin and who now weep for their sheep and preach with the true burden of the Lord. For all this, we give the Lord much praise. Yet we grieve at heart because those who are turning to the Lord with all that is in them represents but a despised remnant. The majority of Christians and shepherds are shutting out the sound of the trumpet and ignoring the cry of the watchmen. The spiritual blindness of the church-going masses must be getting intolerable to God, because He has chosen to move quickly, and openly, to judge His people. The Redeemer has come suddenly to Zion, with great indignation, and He will not withdraw His hand of judgment until every single money changer and thief is driven out of His house. We have only seen the beginning of His awesome judgments upon the crookedness, the lying, the deceptions and the distortions of His gospel. THE SHAKING HAS JUST BEGUN! "For the time has come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17).

"Where have we shepherds failed?" A well-meaning pastor wrote, "You speak out about the failures of shepherds, but you don't tell us where we are failing; I ask in love that you back it with truth." The truth is that we as ministers of the gospel are not keeping to the single purpose of pressing upon believers the true cost of discipleship. Jesus made some very stern, uncompromising demands on those who would follow Him and confess His holy name.

There is not enough alarm in our pulpits and too much of ego and pride. How few now preach through tears and agony over the backsliding and coldness among believers. How tragic that there are so many shepherds today who have lost the true anointing of the Holy Spirit and are now devoted to building their own reputations - focusing not on the needs of the sheep, but on financing and promoting their own expensive dreams.

Paul had a true pastor's heart - a heart always in travail with concern for the spiritual growth of the sheep. To the Corinthians he wrote, "I am jealous over you with godly jealousy; for I have espoused (promised) you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). He spoke of the Galatian sheep as, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). To the Thessalonians he wrote, "Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith" (1 Thessalonians 3:10).

It breaks my heart to realize how far short I am of measuring up to what a loving shepherd ought to be. I am so lacking of the Spirit that moved Paul with such love and concern for the people of God. He said, "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? FOR YE ARE OUR GLORY AND JOY" (1 Thessalonians 2:19). He added "For now we live if ye stand fast in the faith" (1 Thessalonians 3:8).

This dear man of God encouraged the sheep with letters that provoked them to holiness and great hunger for Jesus Christ. He said, "We pray always for you... that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him..." (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12). With tears he could say to them, "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children..." (1 Thessalonians 2:7). "We exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doeth his children" (verse 2: 11).

He did not want their money, and he took great care to never be a burden to the sheep. He said, "We labored and travailed, that we might not be Chargeable (be an expense) to any of you" (2 Thessalonians 3:8). "When we might have been a burden (expense) to YOU Paul instead refused to put on a "cloak of covetousness" because he was "entrusted with the gospel." He sums up his ministry and his single goal in his letter to the Thessalonians, "To the end he may establish your hearts in holiness before God" (1 Thessalonians 3:13).

I beseech God that He would give me such a loving shepherd's heart. Oh, that the Spirit would raise up pastors and evangelists who have no other goal in ministry but to establish believers in holiness and provoke them to LAY HOLD OF CHRIST. There is a heart-rending cry in the land for shepherds who will put aside all the entertainment and buffoonery - and preach the Cross. Tragically, the ministry has so watered down the truth about self-denial and death to sin and self, we have created a generation of loose-living, impotent believers who don't even understand what separation from the world means. Many of our churches are so mixed up with the world, Christians can now out-sin the wicked without blushing. The world is shocked and outraged by the filth and corruption in Christendom.

Much gospel preaching today has no Cross to it, no doctrine of suffering, no reproof, no repentance, no hatred for sin, no demands for separation or purity, no call for unconditional surrender to the Lordship of Christ, no daily dying to the flesh, no crucifying of the lusts of the flesh, no self-denial, no rejection of the self life, and no warnings of coming persecution and impending judgment. Most tragic of all is that many Christians now prefer to hear of their RIGHTS IN CHRIST, to the expense of ignoring HIS CLAIMS ON US!

The cost of taking hold of ChristMultitudes followed Jesus, yet He knew that only a few would go on to really take hold of Him and become true disciples whom He could present with joy to the Father. The Jews wanted to hold to Moses and Christ and to keep their traditions and dead rituals while claiming to be His followers. Jesus would have nothing to do with their double-mindedness. He drew an unmistakable line and he forced them to choose.

Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other. or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

Jesus is exposing the paradox of a divided heart. He is tearing away the facade of phony discipleship and He is telling us what happens to those who try to serve two masters at the same time. We dare not miss our Lord's pointed warning here. The meaning is this - UNFORSAKEN SIN WILL LEAD YOU INTO THE WORST HYPOCRISY POSSIBLE. You will say you love the Lord and that you hate the devil. But by your holding on to the secret lust, idolatry, bitterness, rebellion you are in reality despising the Lord and holding on to satan. You are secretly holding to the one you say you hate while giving the lip service of false love to Him you claim to love.

To such hypocrites Jesus' said, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me... in vain do they worship me..." (Matthew 15:8,9).

The Lord is saying, "You can't get by with testifying that I am the one you love, while all the time you despise Me by your evil doings." The Greek meaning of the word despise is, TO LIGHTLY ESTEEM. To despise the Lord is to NOT TAKE HIS WORD TO HEART. It is to disesteem His claims upon you, as if they are not binding. Let me list some of the claims of Christ on those who would take hold of Him and be His true disciple.

THERE IS A CALL TO LOVE HIM SO PASSIONATELY, THAT EVERYTHING ELSE APPEARS AS HATRED IN COMPARISON.

"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple..." (Luke 14:26).

The Greek word hate as used here infers, TO LOVE LESS BY COMPARISON. Jesus is calling for a love from us that is so all-inclusive, absolute, and fervent that all earthly affections will seem like hate when compared. There is so little passionate, fiery love for Christ today. If our love for Him were red hot, all consuming, intense and joyous there would be no need for outlines and diagrams and instructions on how to pray. We would pray because our hearts are on fire with love for Him. There would be no boredom, no trying to fill up an hour praying all over the world. He would be the object of our prayers; it would be a precious time behind closed doors to give expression to the overflowing admiration and sweet love flooding our hearts.

Reading His Word would never be burdensome and again we would need no formulas on "How to go through the Bible in one year." That is for babies who are not mature enough to understand the privileges and claims of love. Those who love Christ with passion are magnetically drawn to His Word to learn more about Him. They are not seeking cold, historical facts; they are not bogged down in endless genealogies and end-time speculations. All they want is to know Him better, to see more of His beauty and glory, so they can become more like Him. They are wanting more than a doctrine, or a teaching, or information, they want to see Jesus in fullness.

Do we really love Him, or are we merely using Him? Do we even know what it is like anymore to come into His sweet presence, asking nothing, but only reaching out to Him with gratitude and thanksgiving for loving us so completely. Haven't we become very selfish and self-centered in our prayers? We will pray to save America from judgment. "Spare us don't judge us," we cry "Give us, meet us, help us, bless us, use us, protect us" and that may all be scriptural, but the focus is still on US.

We then go to His Word for answers to our problems, for guidance, for comfort, and that is also commendable and right. But where is the love motivated soul who will search the Scriptures diligently, only to discover more and more about his beloved One?

Even in our work for Him we have become selfish. We want Him to bless our service to Him to prove our faith is genuine. We want to be considered diligent, capable, successful, as a sign of His blessing upon us. In my own heart I have been crying out, "Oh Lord, is my own ministry more important to me than you? Is my only motive love for my Saviour or do I want to see something visible I have accomplished for You?" Beloved, our Lord is more interested in what we are becoming in Him, than He is in what we are doing for Him.

Some dear reader is living under bondage because doors of ministry are closed. There could be a feeling of "being on the shelf." Some think they would be more useful to the Lord in some needy mission field. But I say to you that **YOU CANNOT BE MORE USEFUL TO THE LORD THAN MINISTERING LOVE TO HIM IN THE SECRET CLOSET OF PRAYER.** When you are seeking the Lord in prayer, when you are searching His Word to know Him, you are at your peak of usefulness. You could not do more to bless and satisfy Him than to be shut up with Him in loving communication; and whatever He would open for you to do at home or abroad will flow effortlessly out of communion with Him. The Lord is more interested in winning all of me, all my love than in me winning the world for Him. Winning the lost is the natural outgrowth of devotion to Him.

YOU CANNOT SERVE TWO MASTERS AND HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO FINISH!

"For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish" (Luke 14:28-30).

Jesus spoke these words near the close of His ministry on earth with the purpose of warning followers that good intentions would not be enough to see them through hard times. Many followers would not have what it takes to see them through - **THEY WOULD TURN BACK - THEY WOULD NOT FINISH THE RACE!**

Let me tell you what I believe to be the most tragic condition possible on planet earth that is, **ONE WHO STARTED OUT FULLY INTENDING TO LAY HOLD OF CHRIST GROW INTO A MATURE DISCIPLE AND BECOME MORE AND MORE LIKE JESUS, RIGHT UP TO DEATH OR THE END THEN SLOWLY FADE, DRIFT AWAY, AND BECOME COLD AND INDIFFERENT TO HIM WHOM THEY ONCE LOVED.** This is the one who laid a foundation and could not finish, because he did not first count the cost. He ran out of resources; he went so far, then quit.

God, wake us up and make us to understand that we are all **CHANGING.** There is no such thing as standing still; you are either changing daily into Christ's image, or you are changing back into your old carnal ways. For those who have determined to lay hold of Christ at all cost, who are taking up their cross, denying self, and going on with Him, Paul said they are, "...with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

What a joy to meet these who are **FINISHING THE RACE.** They are growing in the wisdom and knowledge of Christ; they are becoming more and more distant from this world and its pleasures; they

are becoming increasingly heavenly minded. Their spiritual senses are highly exercised and their discernment of what is of God or the flesh is ever increasing; and the older they get, the hungrier they are for more of Christ. They cut away all earthly attachments; and with growing intensity, they long to be with Him in His glory. For them, to die is gain, the ultimate prize is to be called into His presence to be evermore at His side. It is not heaven they seek but Christ in glory! Christ has become the delight of their life their all in all.

You can be sure that when Christ returns, He will have a glorious church consisting of those who have so changed into His likeness, having become as unattached to this world and so united with Him, that moving from the corruptible to the incorruptible state will be but one last love step, like breaking through a thin tissue having drawn that close in this life.

Yet, what tragedy to behold so many Christians changing from glory downward into corruption. Paul said of these, "They knew God, but glorified him not as God, neither were thankful... their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they become fools... and CHANGED the truth of God into a lie serving the creature more than the Creator. (Romans 1:21-25).

What incredible darkness is falling upon those who started, but who have been seduced by creature-lusts. They have no Word of God in their hearts to sustain them; they do not pray for Holy Ghost power to overcome satan; they love their pleasures more than Christ so they open themselves again to the beast nature. How fast they change! How blind they become! "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly" (Proverbs 26: 11).

I know this particular message is going to fall into the hands of many who are in the process of CHANGING BACK TO A LIE! It may be just one small step away from Christ, so subtle, perhaps not premeditated but it can lead you into a swift decline away from His love. Some reader may even now be very far from what you once were in Christ. The Holy Spirit is calling you all the way back, back to repentance, back to self-denial and surrender. Time is now a big factor! If you ever intend to get hold of Christ do it now.

YOU WILL EITHER FIGHT TO LAY HOLD OF CHRIST OR END UP SURRENDERING TO SATAN.

"What king, going to war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassador, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:31-33).

We are kings and priests unto the Lord and we represent the ten thousands going out to do battle against satan's army. In Jude it is said that Enoch prophesied, saying, "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints" (Jude 14). It is written, "Greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world" but to the carnal eye it appears that satan is amassing great power.

Satan cares nothing for the carnal, backslidden religious systems; his war is with the holy remnant which he fears greatly. "And the dragon was wroth [angry] with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, WHICH KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD, AND HAVE THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS CHRIST" (Revelation 12:17).

If you have set your heart to lay hold of Christ, you are the devil's target in this final conflict. All that is

in hell will be brought out against you! For you make the principalities and powers of darkness to tremble when you ARE SET ON CHRIST UNCONDITIONALLY AND COMPLETELY!

Are you prepared for what is coming? Are you ready to live out your days in spiritual warfare, knowing that a flood of iniquity is aimed against the people of God? If you are set on laying hold of Christ you are invincible, you are guaranteed victory over all the power of the enemy. As you cleave to the Lord, you have all the hosts of heaven fighting for you.

Moses, speaking for God, told Israel to "make no idols... and walk in God's commandments, and do them..." and in turn "Ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. And five of you shall chase a hundred, and one hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight. Your enemies shall fall before you..." (Leviticus 26: 1, 3, 7-8).

Joshua encouraged the Lord's army with these words - "One man of you shall chase a thousand for the Lord your God, he it is that fighteth for you.... Take heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the Lord your God" (Joshua 23: 10,11). As they loved the Lord, walking in obedience, they were promised, "No man shall be able to stand before you..."

But Moses warned Israel what would happen if they mixed with the world and attempted to serve two masters. "How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the Lord had shut them up?" (Deuteronomy 32:30). When you are no longer clinging to the Rock (Christ), you become cowardly, fearful, and craven before the enemy. Sin, coldness, lukewarmness - this robs the Christian of power and confidence and those who leave their first will end up running in fright from the harassment of the devil.

This ten thousand, if they are cleaving to Christ, walking in submission to His Lordship, can easily defeat the twenty thousands of demonic forces coming at them. No weapon formed against them can prosper (Isaiah 54:17). No matter how the flood of iniquity rages, it cannot hurt this overcoming body of cleaving soldiers of the Cross.

But what happens to those who refuse to let go of secret sin, hidden lusts? They try to make a deal with the devil. They send their conscience out to meet the enemy to negotiate a truce. They seek CONDITIONS OF PEACE. They want to go on claiming to love the Lord, but they don't want to give up that last stronghold, that one besetting sin. Yet they know the devil could swallow them up if they go on flirting with their sin. So they seek a place of compromise.

You can't deal with the devil! You can't compromise in the slightest with sin! It is all out war - defeat for the enemy and victory over all his claims on us! The church is cluttered with the shipwrecks caused by compromise and unsundered sin.

May God put more Holy Ghost fight in us, so we can set our hearts on Christ and shout to the world and all the hordes of hell "No one shall separate me from the love of Christ - Not tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword [war]" (Romans 8:35).

Those who take hold of Christ can sing this song, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:37-39).

Hallelujah!