

encourage giving, to cite the dimensions of generosity, to hold up the supreme examples of giving . . . but when none of these work. Then the negative side needs to be proclaimed without any halting apologies; namely, God is the surest of collectors. If man insists on being miserly and selfish, then God has perfect right to regard his own with perfect freedom. The Bible is crystal clear in teaching that the cattle on a thousand hills are not man's but God's. I believe that one reason our people are having such a difficult time in saving money, despite the fact that they are earning more than ever before, is that the great majorities are not being honest with God in handling their money. It is easy for us to trade the old car in, to buy a new washing machine, or television set . . . but when it comes to honest division with our church, that is wrought with cutting pain.

This is no effort to flush the pockets of professional religionists! This is a poignant reminder that if man is not in partnership with God, then he has already aligned himself with the enemies of God. Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me."

Yesterday afternoon during the lull of a football game I heard a whistle blow. A referee picked up the ball, took it, paced off five yards and placed it down while giving the appropriate signal: five yards penalty for delaying the game. In this game of life the bleachers are packed, the game is under way. Then some of the

players begin to stall, kill time. God, the referee, has to blow the whistle, even now if you please, and ask, "Why are you delaying the game?" "Why are you keeping God's money in your pockets?" That has always delayed the most wonderful game on earth of taking the gospel to the remote corners of the earth to those who know Him not. But that takes money . . . passage on a ship for a Christian missionary costs just as much as it does for a business man. Kilowatts to light the rooms in which the heathen is taught divine truth are financed not by wishful thinking but by dollars and cents. The penicillin administered to a child in New Zealand must be paid for. And that is where we come in. I am asking you for nothing . . . other than for you to give through your nearest church which is a tenth of what God has rightfully, bountifully, and generously given you.

Never shall I forget that winter in Japan when word reached us that the Japanese yen, their dollars, had been devalued. When the payroll for American troops was taken to the local bank to be cashed into Japanese currency, it took a pickup truck to bring it back. Thousands of Japanese dollars were required to match much smaller amounts in American currency. In that devaluation, many local citizens lost all they ever owned.

In the final judgment day, will your currency be devalued? Or will it keep its full value because you have been honest with your God? When we walk with the Lord, we will become like our Lord.

"FIFTY-SEVEN" VARIETIES

October 27, 1957

Scripture: Luke 14:15-24

"Some people stay home because of cold, and some because it is hot; Some because they are getting old, and some because they are not. Some say they don't like the singing of the choir; and others, at odds with a fellow saint who has raised their wrathful ire. Alas, Alas, how excuses grow to drive the thoughts from God; To keep us from the house of prayer . . . the place where our fathers have trod."

It is not only a major soup company

that has fifty-seven varieties but so do millions of professing religious people—fifty-seven varieties of excuses for not doing and being their maximum selves.

For twenty-two years as a preacher I have compiled a catalogue of excuses from deathbeds, midnights, high-noons, summer, winter, the rich, the poor, sick, well, illiterate, well-informed, prominent and obscure, men and women, aged and youth. You might be surprised to find how consistent the excuses run from these various groups and stations in life. No age, nor

section of the country is amiss in this rationalizing.

Jesus said in forthright warning, "Ye blind guides . . . who strain at a gnat and swallow a camel." For that is precisely what excuse making amounts to—straining as though swallowing a gnat were a painful process while a camel passes with minimum effort. What he really is saying is that human nature can do the things it really wants to do . . . whether it affords them or not; whereas, when it comes to honest duty, we can find a thousand and one reasons—or rather excuses—to dodge the work. Straining at a gnat!

Friends, let us look at some of these excuses made by most of us one time or another with the hope that by honest self-analysis we may rid ourselves of this besetting, basic dishonesty.

DON'T FEEL LIKE IT

Topping my list is the current excuses: "I don't feel like it." By this excuse one must often place a great deal of honest credence because this is a sickly world. Millions of people simply don't feel like carrying on. Once they have discharged the fundamentals of eating, sleeping and maintaining the bare essentials of creature existence, they have exhausted their energies. Sickness can color the mood and one's whole outlook. To drive oneself when he is ill even when the motive is to serve God is something that God does not require. Here the person has not an excuse but an honest reason for his life of detachment from the Church of Jesus Christ. But I am thinking about the hordes of people who use the phrase, "I don't feel like it," as a convenient cloak to cover all types of personality hangovers, cantankerous dispositions, and uncooperative spirits.

This business of health is an illusive thing, but the most advanced outposts of thought are pointing us to the fact that so much of how we feel in mind and mood is determined by our frame of mind and the disciplines of thought. A negative, sour attitude can put the body in a state of dispeptic illness; worry and all its pagan allies can put us flat of our backs. So, to give in and say that you don't feel like it, may be the worst encouragement

possible to this undesirable state of things.

When it comes to discipleship in the Kingdom of God, feelings must be of little consideration—excepting of course in the case of serious illness. Why, this day and its highpowered drugs, alcohol and various stimuli take such drastic tolls on our health, that if one waits until he feels like it to serve his Lord, then God would be left waiting most times! What needs to be remembered is that a headache, whether migraine or imaginary can too easily be used as a vote against a willing participation in duty for our Christ.

Such was the real intent of the ten year old school boy who had a splitting headache early in the morning and just couldn't go to school, but who took a strangely favorable turn for the better once the school bus was out of sight. So like ourselves a million times in this convenient yet apparent excuse.

"CHURCH BEHIND TIMES"

Multitudes use a second excuse for their absence from the holy assembly: "the church," they say, "is behind the times." They say that the whole concept is that of a cloister behind dark walls, using phraseology that belongs to the 18th century, dealing with wars that are orthodox but uninteresting, pressing claims upon people that were intended to restrict, forbid and negate. Unfortunately, a degree of this excuse is true, and we readily take our share of the blame for horse and buggy techniques for this jet set. But actually, what is a person really saying who advances this excuse?

He means many times that he doesn't like the preacher; either he preaches too long, or not long enough, he reads his sermon or if he doesn't, he is too impromptu and rambles all over the Bible. Yet, while the person disdains twenty five minutes length in a sermon, he easily sits down to a 400 column newspaper by the hours. Some dull television programs can ramble on for hours without the first protest from our excuse-making friends. Others feel the church is so behind the times in their choirs. Yet, how many choirs have you ever felt rendered superb music? Is it that our standards are

too high, or that we have mastered the art of criticism more than the art of music? No, the church isn't what it ought to be . . . but it never will be so long as millions of its members stand out in a loudmouth criticism of it, rather than buckling down and making it what it ought to be!

Listen to this one: "The church is always asking for money." Glory be . . . indeed it is! And that without an apology! Why? The churches are asking that you simply reach down in your pockets and take God's money out of them where it should have been all the time. That's it. Asking that you give to buy milk for empty stomachs; to buy clothes for cold, naked backs. Yes, the church is raising money, in many instances to put a decent roof over you and your children's head, to buy good hymn books from which you can sing, to heat in winter and air-condition in summer . . . just for the preacher's comfort? Hardly! For all those who would come in out of this pagan world of contradictions and get their souls right with God.

Asking for money, to send missionaries all over this world where we so unquestionably send our business men without counting the cost . . . missionaries to tell the world that much of what they are being told is a lie! To tell the truth which to know aright will set all men free. Money? Yes indeed, but we never forget that it is God's to start with, and to ask God's people to share with Him what they should do without asking is no more an act of presumption than it is to ask a child to brush his teeth when it is for his unquestioned good. "But preacher, I can't afford to give . . . why look at my debts and all the things we want but don't have." That is just our trouble. One has ably characterized this generation as "spending money that we don't have, for things that we don't need, to impress people whom we don't like." You know, it is bad enough to try to keep up with the Joneses but to pass them on a curve is too much!

Every minister has that unregenerate group in his church that is always able to finance Ceasar and their own desires but when it comes to the Church, theirs is a

miserly penny doing and that with the exorcism of painful excuses. What we really can't afford is the ignorance that accompanies this kind of excuse!

"TOO MANY HYPOCRITES"

Still others beggar, "there are too many hypocrites in the church." Well, that is true, one hypocrite in the church is too many. And yet, if this excuse-maker were to come on in the church, he would add one more hypocrite wouldn't he? Oh, I am not trying to be facetious. I had rather be in the church with a few hypocrites now than in hell with all of them hereafter. Who is the hypocrite? One who professes one thing and practices another. Jesus called them "play actors . . . mask wearers." Yet, isn't it ironical that those who are incensed by the presence of these double-standard people in church can work with them all the week in business, fraternize with them socially, go to school with some of them . . . live with them in the same house, and never become incensed at their hypocritical natures except on Sunday and that only in the church. The fact that needs to be faced is that none of us are what we should be . . . that the church is a learning to be like our Christ and so long as we are in the flesh there will be more than each's share of imperfection. But to stand outside and wait until there is perfection in character is like standing outside a school forever waiting until there are perfectly educated men.

"I don't have time" is another old one. What, with the overtime at the job, the many civic duties, the endless round of social engagements, corresponding secretaryship of the "doodlebug club," and my loyalties to lodge and association simply drains off all my time and there is none left for the church. We have as much time as Methuselah had . . . that is, all the time there is and ever has been. And if you fill your life with the rat race of meaninglessness, that is your fault. There is time enough to do the things that matter.

"But I don't have the feeling. I can't accept Christ until that thing hits me in a positive, wonder-working way." This too is an old excuse meaning simply that until

I have once again that adolescent urge of emotional storm, then I can't come to Christ. Well, chances are you won't ever, for you passed that time in life . . . which was more biological than spiritual. You need to approach God through your will power, your intellect and that on your knees in contrition and sincerity . . . whether you feel anything or not.

Wonder how much attention Jesus paid to His feelings when they whipped Him, spat upon Him, spiked His hands and rent His side?

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COMMISSION SPEAKERS NAMED FOR STATE CONVENTIONS

Speakers representing the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission at various state conventions have been announced by Director Paul M. Stevens.

Alabama—November 13 at Mobile, Dr. Edgar M. Arendall, pastor of the Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Brimingham, and member of the Radio and Television Commission.

Arizona—November 14 at Glendale, Clarence E. Duncan, promotional director of the Radio and Television Commission.

Kansas—November 14 at Wichita, Theodore Lott, Director of the Radio Department of the Radio and Television Commission.

Kentucky—November 13 at Harlan, Rev. Thomas H. Shelton, pastor of the Latonia Baptist Church, Covington, Ky., and member of the Radio and Television Commission.

Ohio—November 7 at Hamilton, Rev. Thomas H. Shelton, pastor of the Latonia Baptist Church, Covington, Ky. and member of the Radio and Television Commission.

Oklahoma—November 14 at Tulsa, Dr. James G. Harris, Pastor of the University Baptist Church, Fort Worth, Texas, and member of the Radio and Television Commission.

South Carolina—November 13 at Charleston, Rev. D. M. Rivers, pastor of the Pendleton Street Baptist Church, Greenville, S. C., and member of the Radio and Television Commission.

Texas—November 7 at Fort Worth, Paul M. Stevens, Director of the Radio and Television Commission.

N. C. Baptist Prepare Film on Hospital

"The Ministry of Healing," a movie about the work of the North Carolina Baptist Hospital, has been produced by the North Carolina Baptist State Convention.

Rev. L. J. Morriss, of the Audio-Visual Aids department of that convention directed the motion picture. Rev. Morriss is a former member of the Radio and Television Commission.

The movie pictures what is done in the various departments and clinics of the North Carolina Baptist Hospital by following a patient from his admission through his stay in the hospital until his discharge. The purpose of the film is to show the procedure of admission, the facilities of the hospital, and the latest equipment and the type of service that is rendered to each patient. The film was taken in the hospital, and therefore provides many opportunities to show the actual work being done.

The film was prepared to inform and educate the some 800,000 Baptist of the State of what Baptist are doing in this area and their relationship is to the hospital.

The movie is in full color with sound and is 37 minutes long. It is handled by the Department of Audio-Visual Aids and is available to churches for showing. However, the demand has been so heavy that the movie is booked solid through December.

Television stations have become interested in the film. Ten stations across the state have shown a shortened version of "The Ministry of Healing."

THE BAPTIST HOUR SERMON TOPICS FOR NOVEMBER

General Theme: "When Life Is Worth Living"

November 3—Heaven's Trio of Surprises

November 10—Feet Only

November 17—The Unholy Trio

November 24—A Word From Our Sponsor

- Hear them on The Baptist Hour
- Read them in the December BEAM