

of things and set it right. Invest your life in the things that matter . . . and prove to this world that you can be an improvement. I know why you don't buy our worn shibboleths, our mouthing prayers and our slick doxologies. It is because these have produced this kind of world!

Ours is a solid case of hypocrisy. In the same breath we have talked of God and anti-God. We have known a better way but we haven't walked in that better way. We have asked our youth to do one thing

while we did another. At least one healthy sign is that the youth are not deceived by this doubledealing.

So chart your new course, run with eager zeal and prove to this tired, contradictory society that something better is in the offering for tomorrow. To do this you need to surrender your life to Jesus Christ for it is He and He alone who can reveal His perfect will for you and help you make of your life a worthwhile adventure.

LOOKING AT YOURSELF

July 20, 1958

Scripture: Romans 12:14-21

Life is a grindstone and whether or not it grinds you down or polishes you up depends on what you are made of. Friends, in this sermon let us look at ourselves, not as others see us, but as we really are. We have a way of decrying the woes of the world, the troubles of society, the sins of the human race. There really is nothing wrong with the world. The trouble is with us as Shakespeare reminds, "Brutus, the trouble is not in our stars, but in ourselves."

In talking about his wild impulses, Carl Sandburg exclaimed, "I think I have a whole menagerie under my ribs," by which he meant, his inner life acted like a whole group of wild animals, screaming and crying out for expression. This is just another novel way of saying that the inner makeup of nature is often a mysterious and awful anatomy needing to be understood more than anything.

As you look at yourself you may be inclined to dislike what you see, or what you feel. Others are too inclined to like all that they see. It is the purpose of this sermon to point out three possible courses of action that are open to us all when we look at ourselves under close scrutiny.

DEFY SELF

One thing one can do is to defy himself. Simply to resist one's self on every hand is the lot of missions. Falling so far short

of what they would like to be or do or say, there is a type of resistance that follows which robs life of much of its meaningfulness. It is not difficult to find many people who are at civil war with themselves.

Having discovered the weak spots in their personalities, instead of setting themselves to the work that would strengthen, instead, they aggravate the weakness, pick at the sore spots and set up a battery of defiant resistance. Little wonder that this self battling prevents one from accepting himself as he is. If he is not battling himself, he usually is at war with other people. Such a person seldom knows a minute of real joy or happiness.

Life is lived between boxes of pills, another drink, another interview or someone's lecture or sermon. Pretty soon the person is victimized by a rat race of obsessions, running from one witch doctor to another as though this exhaustive effort would result in some sort of cure. The folly is accentuated by changing jobs, or moving from one community to another, or divorcing the life's partner, whereas the real trouble most times is neither in the job nor in the partner but in ourselves. This is defiance! Fighting ourselves instead of accepting as we are and then setting our energies in the direction of self-improvement.

DEMAND PERFECTION

Defiance usually means belligerence . . . a war-like attitude. Naturally, to this kind

of person perfectionism is demanded. He really never heard a good solo, sermon, or discussion because all fall below his perfectionist expectation. With his fists doubled up toward every situation, he fails to understand while suspecting the motives of most.

Many times this ugly process started in extreme youth . . . perhaps in the cradle. It may have started with defiance about the milk bottle being a bit chilled, or the mother's palm that stung the child out of a temper tantrum. Through the growing years one thing added to another until at fifty still there is the scowling defiance of the baby-man who never grew up.

Last week I saw this truth of defiance in demonstration. A young college student came to my office in a mood of depression and a tone that spoke of complete defeat. He had lost interest in his studies, had resigned from all his college offices and was on the verge of suicide.

After talking with him for a while, I found out that he had never accepted the fact that he didn't have a strong, muscular body. He had tried all the bodybuilding courses, worked out in the gyms, etc. but still had a lean, skinny frame. This had grown into an obsession with him . . . so much so that what he did have by way of a build was withering away from a poor appetite due to his defiance of his real self.

DESPISE SELF

There is a second course of action open to us when we look at ourselves with honest vision. We can despise ourselves. While defiance setup a kind of civil war inside, this second attitude can cut the foundation out from under us. The person who is thus guilty seldom has the courage to take his own life, but he does something worse, he slowly takes the joy out of living for many other people. This self-despiser fancies himself as the "picked-on" member of society, the one who never got the breaks or what was coming to him by the way of his rightful due. Though not taking his life outright, he insists on a type of self-mutilation, an effort to warp, twist or pervert life.

When one despises himself quite natur-

ally he will not have an exalted opinion of other people. He looks for the sordid in life. Ever alert to the hidden motive he can't quite believe anything decent when he sees it.

Recently I read about a man who had served eight million customers in forty-seven cafeterias and thirty-seven retail outlets over a period of forty years. He concluded from all this contact with humanity that about 97% of the human race is basically honest. He based his conclusion on a type of honor system used for paying for meals. But the self-despiser would have us believe that about 97% of the human race is dishonest. He gets the foolish notion that at least every other man is out to hurt you or put you out of business.

DEDICATE SELF

The third course of action before us is the only intelligent one of the three: we can dedicate ourselves. Not defy nor despise but dedicate, that is, take yourself as you are . . . apart from all wishful thinking . . . and deposit it at the feet of God for his remaking. Say to yourself, "God has made me and while my decisions and choices may have warped, detoured, or derailed my life, He is able to take the broken parts and put me back together as He would have me."

Dedication is not the surrender of life's zest and punch, it is not a mild and insipid sentiment. Instead, it has muscle in it . . . strength that takes a hold and refuses to turn loose. Dedication is taking

Speaking Engagements

Paul M. Stevens

July 27-August 3—Gambrell St. Baptist Church, Fort Worth, Tex.

August 3—Bolivar Baptist Church, Bolivar, Tex.

August 4-6—Louisville, Ky.

August 14-20—Mt. Baker Baptist Assembly, Mt. Baker, Wash.

August 24—First Baptist Church, Lubbock, Tex.

your life with all its bruises and burns, its brands and pains to the only source of relieving succor.

There are many things about you that you can never change . . . but God can and that's the sum of it. That's the business that God is in . . . erasing the leopard's spots, cleansing the leper's sores, removing the pangs of venomous guilt. That is why we sing that old invitational song, "Just as I am . . ." God will take you as you are and make you as you ought to be. Such is the divine mystery of regeneration . . . that wondrous process of conversion.

The dry bones of self-defiance can be clothed with new life and movement; the dusty desert of futility and self-despising can become a verdant oasis where clear waters flow. But sitting in the corner of self-dejection and depression will never

permit the fragrance of new life to be breathed through your nostrils!

HONEST EFFORT

You, too, can do something about it. Get up off the cushions of self-pity and put yourself to some honest effort and watch the change. Why, a hundred years ago one-half of all the patients operated on died of infection. Lord Lister set himself to pitying them. Then he set himself to honest research. He worked and waited three years without success. Then he discovered the world-famous antiseptic and the result was that more lives were saved than the total number of lives lost in all the wars during the 19th century. An honest effort to change things did it!

God stands now at your heart's door saying in deadly serious words, "Why despise or defy yourself when you can dedicate it and truly live?"

"I HAVE FOUGHT . . ."

July 27, 1958

Scripture: II Timothy 4:2-8

Life is a battle from the cradle to the grave.

No one knew this fact better than the Apostle Paul who, at the end of his life said, "I have fought." He could have said, "I have loved, I have cried, I have suffered" with equal justification but instead, he said, "I have fought a good fight." These words have real meaning for the people to whom he wrote since their country was occupied by foreign troops.

Warfare was the best known art of that day as well as our day. Little wonder that Paul would have used a term so familiar to the people.

Life's warfare is waged on many battlefields. For multi-millions it is a battle for meat and bread. The gnawing, constant sweat to keep body and soul together is never ended for most.

Others fight intellectual battles . . . warring in the mind with all its contradictions and conflicts.

Then there is a spiritual warfare in which our spirits are in struggle with spirits of other religions.

Some fight themselves, or other people, or God. All will agree that life is one battle after another.

TWO WORLDS

This fact is made necessary by admitting that we are citizens of two worlds . . . this life and the life hereafter. Were this one all, then one could surrender to the baser appetites, the lustful indulgence. But he is born for other and more than this life, hence the struggle upward and the crossfire that results. His two natures assure fighting: the nature of conscience and spiritual refinement demanding purity; the old, unregenerate nature too akin to dust demanding sloven backwardness and vulgarity.

There are no final battles in life. Each generation must fight its own. The battles for freedom for instance, are never finally won, they must be fought and re-fought much as the citizens of the Netherlands who must constantly repair their dikes lest the relentless waves of the Sea creep in and deposit their death-dealing salts.

If everybody alive were won to Christ,