

**President Paige Patterson's Address  
Southern Baptist Convention 2000  
June 13, Orlando, Florida**

Sweet saints of God gathered here in Orlando for the 143<sup>rd</sup> assembly of messengers from our 40,000 plus cooperating Southern Baptist churches: When I was a nine-year old boy in the piney woods of Southeast Texas, neither Sunday School nor Training Union stamped my life forever. But I shall never forget singing with the other scratchy, breaking voices of boys just anticipating manhood,

I am a stranger here, within a foreign land;  
My home is far away, upon a golden strand;  
Ambassador to be of realms beyond the sea,  
I'm here on business for my King.

This is the King's command: that all men, ev'rywhere,  
Repent and turn away from sin's seductive snare;  
That all who will obey, with Him shall reign for aye,  
And that's my business for my King.

My home is brighter far than Sharon's rosy plain,  
Eternal life and joy thro'out its vast domain;  
My Sov'reign bids me tell how mortals there may dwell  
And that's my business for my King.

*Chorus:*

This is the message that I bring,  
A message angels fain would sing:  
"Oh, be ye reconciled,"  
Thus saith my Lord and King,  
"Oh, be ye reconciled to God."

Yes, it was in Royal Ambassadors that I had affirmed the message first taught me in my home: that is, I needed to be reconciled to God because of the rebellion of my own heart. The lay counselors who pitched for batting practice, who helped us cook our first meals around the campfire, and who taught us to play games of strength and dexterity, such as "Buck, Buck, How Many Horns Are Up"—these same men were the agents of God used to convince me that God had called me to be an agent of reconciliation. Yes, moreover, the Lord had appointed me to be an ambassador for Christ, pleading with men everywhere to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

With that in mind, please again devote your uninterrupted attention for a few brief moments to the reading of God's Word. This chapter five of 2 Corinthians provided the matrix that transformed my own life on a March evening in 1951, the year of my personal reconciliation to God and of my appointment as a heavenly ambassador to an alien world. Listen to its words, 2 Cor. 5, beginning in verse 9:

Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences. For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us to the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Time and the business of the Convention prevent the exposition of the whole passage. Should you and your congregation wish to sit for the two-hour explanation of the whole, I would be honored to come to your church and thus unburden myself. But I did want you to hear the portion of the chapter that terminates in the honorable and responsible assignment of ambassadorship. The theme of ambassadorship is wonderfully appropriate to make clear what it means to have citizenship in Heaven while living in a world that is rebellious and hostile toward its Creator and Sovereign.

The term *presbeuomen*, translated "ambassador," boasts a noble lexicographical DNA. Related to *presbuteros*, or "elder," the term ambassador held in its ethos the idea of age or maturity; and if not the idea of age, at least the concept (even if the ambassador were young) that deference, in any society, should be paid to the ambassador. Hence, nobility and honor were at once captured in the term "ambassador."

There is more. In the Greco-Roman city-state and later in the vast reaches of the Roman Empire, the term "ambassador" denoting a representative entrusted with freedom to operate in a distant court, is found but only within the bounds agreed upon by the Sovereign who had commissioned such an ambassador.

But the word that occurs here in verse 20 is not the noun *presbutes*, but the verbal form *presbeuomen*. A very literal rendering of the word would be "we are ambassadorizing," not "we are ambassadors." In other words, "ambassador" is not merely a title of honor but an activity. The title "ambassador" identifies both who we are and what we do! Consequently, the deportment (or behavior) of the ambassador ought to be such that neither the credibility of his message nor the reputation of the Sovereign he represents should be diminished by his actions.

Moreover the focus today is not on the honor of the ambassadorial vocation, but rather we set our faces to examine the considerable motivation for faithful discharge of ambassadorial duties. In the text, we shall discover at least three distinctive motivations. Note first in verses 9–11 **Accountability**—an ambassador is aware of his inevitable accountability. In verses 12–15

**Affection**—the ambassador is introduced to the incomparable affections of Christ, which provide the foundation for his embassy. Finally, in verses 17–21, **Assignment**—the incredible assignment itself is elucidated.

### The Inevitable Accountability

We begin with the inevitable accountability. The apostle Paul senses the necessity to be well pleasing to God. A very good initial reason for this accountability is the knowledge that every believer must appear before the *bema*, the judgment seat of Christ. Most Greco-Roman city-states boasted a *bema*—one of the best preserved of which can be visited in ancient Corinth on the Peloponnesus. The *bema* was, in fact, a military reviewing stand by which the troops passed in significant array. Awards were given for valor on the field of battle and for victory in the various races and other events at the conclusion of the Isthmian games.

There are exceptions to most everything. The rule was, however, that the *bema* was not so much a place where life and death issues were decided as it was a point of assembly where appropriate reward was bestowed. This being the case, we should distinguish in our theology between the Lord's Great White Throne judgment, before which only unbelievers are arraigned, and the *bema*, before which only believers are assessed.

Although the word *bema* is not used in 1 Corinthians 3, the description found there is almost certainly the more extended explanation of what Paul only mentions in passing in 2 Corinthians 5. But the apostle sees as a serious matter the inevitability of this appearance at the judgment seat of Christ for the receiving of those things done in the body—whether good or worthless. He concludes by saying, "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." Whether the verse should be interpreted as a sense of the terror of God that will pervade the ungodly in the day of judgment, or whether it is the apostle's awareness of the terror of God in the light of his own responsibility for witness, is not a conundrum that we must resolve. There is truth in both, and the two most certainly are not unrelated. It is because we know what it would mean to fall into the hands of an angry God that our sense of obedience to God's command ought to motivate us to be as much concerned as is our Lord. If He thought the human race sufficiently worthy to send His own Son to die a vicarious and substitutionary death on the cross, the very least we can do to please Him is to share our Savior's concern for the lost.

This awareness of the awesomeness of what it is like to be accountable to God motivates many of our concerns in Baptist life today. For example, we are concerned about worldwide religious liberty, which is appropriately defined as the open marketplace of religious discussion in which everyone is entitled to follow his conscience, even if that means a changing of the mind. In that kind of an open marketplace of ideas, Christianity will inevitably triumph. Its compelling argument about a God who cared sufficiently to send His only begotten Son to die on the cross to forgive our sins and reconcile us to Himself is a message not even remotely duplicated by the loftiest expressions of all of the humanly contrived religious faiths of our world.

If you have not yet had the opportunity to view *The Chicago Declaration on Religious Freedom: Sharing Jesus Christ in a Pluralistic Society*, I trust you will examine it carefully and pass it along to others. I have never been inclined to sign statements, especially those of an ecumenical nature, but I am grateful for the courage of evangelicals who crossed denominational lines to draft this magnificent declaration emphasizing the obligatory nature of our Christian mission. To this I have gladly provided my signature. Whatever the cost, Southern Baptists must ever champion the cause of religious liberty.

Because of this sense of the impending judgment of God, the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention has produced prayer guides in behalf of peoples of varying faiths around the world. Make no mistake about it, we need never apologize for such **accountability** to our missionary assignment. Because of the impending judgment of God, the Christian school movement, both in its expression of home schooling and in the more traditional school model, gains its impetus and must be encouraged by us all. Our children and grandchildren are, after all, our first responsibility before God. Anticipation of the impending judgment of God causes Southern Baptists to sense the need for personal holiness and to be determined to protect our children and our grandchildren from the ever-escalating graphic violence, promiscuous and aberrant sexual escapades, and the blasphemous anti-religious forays of the entertainment industry. Charleton Heston, in his recent compelling address to the National Rifle Association, hit the piñata square in the side when he said,

But first, I want to address the cultural issues. In a word, I believe our problem stems from a bizarre mentality that breeds anger, hopelessness, despair, and sometimes murder.

It is a bizarre mentality, but it is not an alien one. Quite the contrary. It is omnipresent and has, for many young people, replaced the mentality on which this nation was founded—a mentality that honored transcendent truth, personal responsibility, and duty to others.

American democracy was created for self-governing individuals—people who did the right thing whether or not anyone else was watching. It was created for people who honored the golden rule not because it was a rule, but because they understood that it truly was golden.

Let me be blunt. The first step we can take toward restoring our nation is for each of us to recognize that we, as individual citizens, have all too often drifted with the cultural tide that has brought us to this unhappy place.

We should not be surprised that some of our children are killing each other in our schools and on our streets.

We should not be shocked that many of our children have no sense of purpose, and feel hopeless and empty even in this era of unprecedented plenty.

We should not be surprised that, in the absence of the faith of our fathers, our children have adopted bizarre creeds, beliefs, and practices.

We truly are reaping what we have sown. And it is a very bitter harvest.

There are a frightful number of children growing up with very little parental discipline and guidance, which is crucial for helping them develop self-control and for feeling that they are loved and cared for.

No wonder so many look for love in all the wrong places. Those are often the only places left.

Our children have also been forced to live in a relentlessly secular culture. They have been robbed of much of their religious heritage by the complete banning of religion from public life, especially in our schools.

Don't think for a second that our kids haven't gotten the message. They can discuss almost anything in school except "Thou shalt not kill" and "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Discussing the abiding truths of our Judeo/Christian faith makes the adults very, very testy—sometimes to the point of legal action. And that sends a very clear message to kids: Religion is either somehow bad or, at the very best, irrelevant to their lives.

I am also fully convinced that our extremely liberal abortion laws have undermined the traditional bedrock view that innocent life is sacred.

Which finally brings me to our entertainment industry. Let me be very clear. Our entertainment industry creates many wonderful works. Some are nothing short of astounding. My kids and I watch *Beauty and the Beast* over and over.

But this industry also bombards our children with epics of blood, sex, and nihilism. Some are overt, such as Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers*. Others are much more subtle.

And there is no doubt in my mind that children are getting the message.

Our sense of the impending judgment of God leads us to confront opinions and actions that are out of sync with the teaching of God's Word and that find their expression in items like this superb North American Mission Board presentation of the dangers of Freemasonry and other secret fraternities, which is available to the churches through the North American Mission Board booth here at the Convention. It is further the sense of impending doom for sinners that has led our North American Mission Board to prepare ads such as the ones you are about to see on the screens. These ads are even now airing throughout the Orlando region to explain the message of salvation in Jesus Christ and to help people understand who Southern Baptists are. The North American Mission Board is presently working on a plan to make these commercials available for usage by churches, associations, and state conventions. Every church present can obtain its free copy of these commercials at the North American Mission Board booth.

This awesome accountability for truth led messengers of last year's Convention in Atlanta to ask the president to appoint a committee to study and bring revisions to the *Baptist Faith & Message* confession of what most Baptists believe to be true. At this Convention you will consider the superb work of that wonderful committee. They have labored to clarify the views of Southern Baptists on racism, the sanctity of the family, abortion, homosexuality, the Scriptures, and the role of the pastor. For more than twenty years now, you have attended these Conventions and voted to return to the faith of our fathers and to be bound only by the authority of Christ and the God-breathed Word of our Lord. Now let us tell the world in a succinct confession of those truths most widely believed among us. May we seize this moment in A.D. 2000 to give our distinctive witness to a watching world with overwhelming endorsement of these freshly stated truths from God's Word.

The overwhelming obligation we have to a world that will inevitably face the Great White Throne judgment of God compels us in our celebration of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cooperative Program to reaffirm to our own people that the Cooperative Program is as old as

the New Testament. As Baptists we have simply given this program described in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 a name and developed a Convention-wide mechanism whereby our people can cooperate together so that an army of churches can advance on the very gates of hell itself. And may I just note in passing that the Cooperative Program is the envy of the rest of the religious world. Yet, if pastors do not pass this ingenious plan along to the younger generation and lead their churches to serious and generous participation, we shall yet kill the goose that laid the golden egg.

This same sense of accountability has led Dr. Morris H. Chapman, the president of our Executive Committee, to bring to this Convention a proposal addressing the foundation of the social order—the family—and to ask Dr. Tom Elliff to chair this effort to restore the biblical role of the family to our western civilization. Forces of darkness have descended upon our society in an attempt to destroy our families at every level. Dr. Chapman's proposal to save our families is in reality a plea to save our churches and our social order.

But above all else, we ought to be compelled by our awareness of the inevitability of our appearance before the living Lord, whose eyes are like a flame of fire, to provide for Him an account of the stewardship of our time on this earth and of our efforts in behalf of bringing the gospel to every man person. If criminals would quake before the awesome powers of an earthly judiciary, how much more we, as recipients of the love of our sovereign God, should quake at the concept of blood on our hands when we stand before the Lord of the universe.

Though all of you who know me today will doubtless be astonished, I confess that as a child I was remarkably creative. A more accurate translation of that phrase would be "frequently out of control." But, mind you, it was always for a good cause. For example, I once discovered a colony of very small frogs in our backyard. Infatuated with all forms of animal life, I naturally felt that I could give a better home to the frogs than they had managed to discover on their own. For awhile, however, an exact domicile for them eluded me until I discovered the perfect house—my father's tall cowboy boots, almost never worn, stationed at the back of his closet.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I ask you in all fairness, as before any impartial counsel of adjudication, how could I have known that there was a Sunday School Cowboy Roundup that night and that, for the first time in my memory, my father intended to wear his boots? The cry of distress from my father's bedroom upon the insertion of his first foot was the first indication I had that the Great Tribulation had apparently dawned upon me a number of years prior to its biblical scheduling. I must confess to you that the dread I felt in my heart over my arraignment before my father was only partially the consequence of having done wrong and having to face inevitable punishment. Far more excruciating than that torture, whatever it might be, was the fact that I had inflicted hurt on the earthly being whom I knew loved me more than anybody else.

Ladies and gentlemen, if we do not understand it this moment, thirty seconds in Heaven will reveal the height, the breadth, the depth, and the awesome splendor of the significance of the death of Christ on the cross in our behalf. And when we stand at the judgment seat of Christ to be addressed regarding our witnessing responsibilities, God help this Baptist preacher and seminary president to be able to hear from the Savior, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

### **The Incomparable Affection**

However, as motivating a factor as is the certainty of standing before an ominous and sovereign God, yet a more commanding motivation appears. It is articulated by the apostle Paul in the simple statement of verse 14 when he said, "For the love of Christ compels us." The love of Christ first confronts us in this Corinthian passage in the tragic human condition,



which was thrust upon us by the fall of our first parents in the Garden. Because of their iniquity, each of us has been born with such an inclination and proclivity toward evil that we are rendered helpless before it. And as it was with Adam, so it is with all of us that "The wages of sin is death," and "The soul that sinneth must surely die," and "He that eats of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in the day that he eats thereof he shall surely die."

But herein is the incomparable love of Christ. In verse 15, according to that love He "died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again." The language of substitution is unavoidable in this text as it is in so many others. The refrain is even restated afresh in verse 21: Jesus "who knew no sin [was made] to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." What a remarkable come-to-pass! What an incomparable expression of love! Our Creator God, who because of His eternal and fulfilling fellowship in the Godhead alone, has no real need of us, loved us so profoundly that He sent His Son to die in our behalf.

But consider that in addition to His substitutionary death on the cross, He extends His incomparable love to a new creation. Just as the initial creation of the cosmos and of a creature in the image of God, able to know and experience God for himself, was an act of grace, so grace abounds continually more as we are told that "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new." In our human relationships so many devastating events occur for which forgiveness is never offered, and other events come when forgiveness is offered, but not accepted.

Showing a group of guests through the First Baptist Church of Dallas, we came to a beautiful, small chapel where the vows of many marital unions were offered before God and a crowd of witnesses. Noting that the janitorial service had apparently failed to clean the chapel, I reached down to pick up a yellow sack lying on the floor. I found that it weighed more than a sack ought, and upon examining it more thoroughly, I discovered a broken wedding band that had been placed in a vice and beaten until it was broken and misshapen. It was then that I saw a note on that yellow sack. I hold it in my hand today. A distraught husband whose sacred vows of commitment had been ravaged by divorce had evidently slipped into the chapel with the ring and left it there in the yellow sack. These are the words that remain written on the sack until today, "I return this broken ring to the place where it was blessed. Pray God forgive she that broke it, but pray that He will grant me the grace to forgive her as I ask Him to forgive me. Use this metal as you will in God's work. And if you would, say a prayer for I that hurt. 6-9-71 to 3-8-77."

Today I still do not know to whom the ring belonged, and I cannot say whether he found the forgiveness that he sought or was able to rise to the godly grace of full forgiveness for the one who had hurt him. Nor do I know, even if he succeeded, whether she who engendered such hurt ever knew of his forgiveness or accepted it. Such is the tragedy of our human ways. But in the midst of such overwhelming tragedy, what is to be said for a God who is of such a compassionate nature as to watch the trashing of His creation because of the rebellion of that creature whom He created for fellowship with Himself alone. Yet God's love abounds toward that creature in such a way that He not only died for him but also let him have a new beginning despite that creature's efforts of narcissistic arrogance and disregard for the Creator.

Nor is it simply a matter of permission, but rather the Spirit of the Living God aggressively moves in and takes residence within the body of a human being, making that body the *naos*, the Holy of Holies, the temple where the Holy Spirit dwells, and thus regenerating him and making him new again. Whereas human forgiveness has its limits and its inabilities, divine forgiveness is limited only by the man who refuses to accept it. We cannot help but say, "The love of Christ compels us."

### The Incredible Assignment

But what shall we say about the nature of this revelation? Certainly we are called to service by the sense of inevitable accountability and by the presence of an incomparable affection. But for us as Southern Baptists, and I believe for all genuine evangelical believers, this leads to an incredible assignment. The apostle concludes, "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God."

Southern Baptists, this world is not our home. We are just a-passing through. Our citizenship is in heaven where the Sovereign of this universe has prepared a place for us. Usually at the end of an ambassadorial assignment, one can anticipate retirement from active service to a lovely vacation home somewhere in the mountains or on the beach. But, praise God, the home to which we are called is a part of this city whose builder and maker is God. It is not a retirement at all; the invitation is rather to a place where there is no need for any retirement because there is never anyone who is tired. To the contrary, we are citizens of a city and a kingdom where we worship the risen Lord, the Lamb upon His throne, forever and forever, where the twenty-four elders cast their crowns before Him, and where the angels of God shout antiphonally across the Heaven, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts."

But we have not yet graduated to that kingdom. We are still on assignment in an alien and hostile world, and what an assignment it is! We are ambassadors for Christ. It is as though God is pleading with the world through us, "Be reconciled to God."

For that reason I stand before you today, Southern Baptists, and admonish all of us together to devote ourselves as never before to getting the saving gospel of Jesus Christ to all six billion people on the face of this globe. This is the missionary task to which we now must devote ourselves with renewed vigor. This is the task that the International Mission Board is to spearhead. This missionary task is what the Bible is all about.

### LOTTIE MOON

**LOTTIE:** Young man, who are you? Young man, I am talking to you. Yes, you, who are you?

**PATTERSON:** I am Paige Patterson.

**LOTTIE:** Hmm. Never heard of you.

**PATTERSON:** Well, okay, then who are you?

**LOTTIE:** I am Lottie Moon.

**PATTERSON:** You are Lottie Moon.

**LOTTIE:** Yes. Who did you think I was?

**PATTERSON:** Well, I confess I really had no idea. But like all of our people here, we are honored to be in your presence. After all, you know we have raised millions of dollars for world missions in your name every year.

**LOTTIE:** Yes, yes, and I am very grateful for that offering, and I am honored that you do it in my name. But I must tell you, young man, that I am very much afraid it amounts to little more than "surrogate" missions.



**PATTERSON:** Surrogate missions? What exactly do you mean by that?

**LOTTIE:** Well, I mean it just like Jesus said, "This you ought to have done and not to have left the other undone."

**PATTERSON:** What's the "other" that we have left undone?

**LOTTIE:** Well, for example, when will your parents offer their children to God as missionaries rather than just sending their money? Do they ever intend to go themselves to a mission assignment? You know, I sacrificed just about everything. On December 24, 1912, when I concluded my mission for Christ in Kobe harbor, I had literally given my all. I sacrificed the possibility of marriage and turned my back on Crawford Toy, whom I loved until the day of my death. But because of his view of the Bible, I could not marry him or return to China with him. Can I just ask you, young man, and the other Southern Baptists here: What is it that you have sacrificed for the lost of the world?

**PATTERSON:** Well, Miss Moon, I thought that I had lived fairly sacrificially for Christ, but as I consider all that you have said to us today, I am prepared to admit that my sacrifices have been few and relatively insignificant. But it is my belief, Miss Moon, that you, together with that great cloud of witnesses in the heaven will see a new day among Southern Baptists as we sacrifice whatever is necessary to get the gospel to the world.

### ADONIRAM JUDSON

**PATTERSON:** Excuse me, sir. Who are you? And what are you doing?

**JUDSON:** (*Looking distracted*). Oh, I am Adoniram Judson, and I am playing with a child.

**PATTERSON:** Well, yes, I can clearly see that you are playing with a child, and now that you have identified yourself, I certainly know who you are, but I do not understand why you are playing with a child.

**JUDSON:** Well, as you may know, I buried almost all of my children in Burmese soil. People say that Ann and I made incredible sacrifices for the sake of getting the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Burmese people. When we arrived in Burma in 1813, there was no one at the dock to meet us. We labored for years to see just one man come to Christ. In prison, my pillow was my translation of the Bible into Burmese. And, oh, my babies, my precious little ones, and even my precious Ann paid the ultimate price.

**PATTERSON:** Yes, and Southern Baptists look with admiration at your work.

**JUDSON:** Now that you mention it, I am more than just a little concerned about you Southern Baptists. While I buried so many of my children in Burmese soil, it seems that even when none of you would be called upon to live like the Judson family had to live or die like my family had to die, you are not even willing to bury your own selfishness and to give of yourselves and your money and your prayers to share the gospel. I wonder if Burma would ever have heard the gospel if it had been up to you Southern Baptists.

**PATTERSON:** Dr. Judson, your questions are disturbing. I can only tell you that your sacrifice is not lost on Southern Baptists.

**JUDSON:** I should hope not! All that I ask of you, in Jesus' name, is to bury your materialism like I buried my children. Will you sleep less comfortably in order to get the Word of God to the nations? Can I count on you to persevere even when the task seems impossible?

**PATTERSON:** Yes, Dr. Judson, I believe you can count on Southern Baptists. It will not be easy for us to bury our materialism. But just as you did bury your children and even a precious wife in your determination to get the gospel to the people of Burma, so I believe you can count on Southern Baptists to persevere even when it seems to be impossible.

### **BILL WALLACE OF CHINA**

**WALLACE:** Sir, sir, what on earth are you saying?

**PATTERSON:** I am attempting to remind my fellow Southern Baptists about our mission obligation. And besides, who do you think you are—Bill Wallace of China?

**WALLACE:** Yes, I am Dr. Wallace, and you are wasting your breath. My message to you today is to urge you to retire from the world scene immediately. Bring back your missionaries and let them serve churches at home. Whatever you do, do not go forward with the international mission enterprise.

**PATTERSON:** Why on earth would you say a thing like that, Dr. Wallace? That sounds quite contrary to everything we would have expected to hear from you.

**WALLACE:** It's just the sense that I have from watching you Southern Baptists. I doubt that you have much of a heart for sacrifice, and I am certain that you do not have the courage to stay when persecution and difficulty become severe. And, frankly, even if you do have Baptist missionaries who are willing to stay and to sacrifice, I especially have my questions about you folks at home.

**PATTERSON:** What do you mean by that?

**WALLACE:** Very simple. If the supreme sacrifices begin to be made in terms of life and death, I have an idea that instead of redoubling your prayer effort, you folks at home will just begin to complain and put blame on what you now call the International Mission Board for some supposed failure on their part.

**PATTERSON:** Well, Dr. Wallace, with all due respect for and gratitude to you, I think you are wrong. I think Southern Baptists will rise to the assignment of our Lord, making whatever sacrifices are necessary and trusting the providences of a Holy God.

**WALLACE:** Well, good. Then get on with the mission, but know that it will be costly, and you must be prepared. Many of us who have paid the ultimate sacrifice will be part of that great cloud of witnesses. We will be watching!

**PATTERSON:** Well, thank you, Dr. Wallace. You have set an unbelievable example for us, and we Southern Baptists will certainly not forget the challenge that you have given to us here.

### BERTHA SMITH

**BERTHA:** Young man, what is going on here?

**PATTERSON:** Well, this is a meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention. Is that you Miss Bertha?

**BERTHA:** Yes, I am Bertha Smith, and I have not been at one of these Southern Baptist Conventions for awhile. Can't say I've missed it much either. We get together in heaven, but we don't fight, and no one ever questions God's Word.

**PATTERSON:** Miss Bertha, we have missed you even if you haven't missed us.

**BERTHA:** No, you don't miss me. You were always scared to death of me. No, wait, that was one of those other preachers, wasn't it?

**PATTERSON:** (*Laughing*). Yes, do you remember that night in Kansas City when we were all down praying, and you called on him to confess his sins, Miss Bertha? That was the funniest thing I ever saw.

**BERTHA:** Well, if you think that is so funny, why don't we just confess yours right this minute, young man.

**PATTERSON:** Oh, no, no. Hey, I am so sorry I laughed. In fact, I am sorry I even mentioned it. Please don't make me do that, Miss Bertha.

**BERTHA:** Oh, all right, we probably don't have enough time for you to confess all of your sins anyway. But you better tell these people that it is not programs, but prayer, that God honors. Southern Baptists have a terrible habit of forgetting the words of Jesus, "Without Me, you can do nothing." I am grateful for the willing sacrifice of our missionaries and for the emphasis that the Convention places on missions; but unless our people remain before the throne in concentrated intercession, you are never going to see a great movement of God among Southern Baptists.

**PATTERSON:** Miss Bertha, we are certainly going to keep that in mind. If you just won't make me confess all of my sins publicly, I for one am going to work harder on the prayer assignment.

**BERTHA:** All right. We will skip the confession of sin for now, but you had better get with the prayer efforts.

**PATTERSON:** Yes, Miss Bertha, you have my word that we are going to do that.

Ladies and gentlemen, my precious Southern Baptist people, we have the sacrificial intervention of our living Lord as a motivation for the ambassadorship to which we have received a call. And we have seen the heroes of our own faith line the way before us and call out to us as it were from Heaven that their sacrifices, their prayers, and their witness not be in vain.

Shubal Stearns beckons to us from the banks of Sandy Creek to give ourselves to evangelism and a great church-planting movement. From his leathered mount, Luther Rice cries that we have yet more missionaries to support; will we not bury our materialism and exhibit the generosity of genuinely redeemed hearts? B. H. Carroll lifts his towering physical frame and as tears make the journey from his aging eyes to the tip of his long, white beard, he pleads with our women to recover the most critical of their ministries, that of motherhood, and pray our sons and daughters to God just as his mother did. Lee Rutland Scarborough thunders from his Chair of Fire at Southwestern Seminary that we are to join with Christ after the lost. You have heard already the challenges of Lottie Moon, Bertha Smith, Adoniram Judson, and Bill Wallace, martyr of China.

But linger please but a moment more. What is this I see? A Ukrainian babushka, a victim of Chernobyl. She now lies in physical agony with intense radiation sickness and advanced cancer. Her wrinkled brow tells the story of many sorrows and few joys in life. Now on the precipice of eternity, she lingers with no hope. Do we care? Is she as important as our careers? Will you take her a Gospel of John? Will you take to her the one message that can vanquish her sorrows?

See—there he is on the streets of Salvador in Brazil. He is a forty-year old man on his way home to kill himself. He has joined one-half million others at Carnival in hopes that the blast of rock music, the frivolities of the street dancing, and the mocking, anesthetizing qualities of cheap beer will absolve his guilt and drown his sorrows. Empty and disillusioned, death is the only release he can imagine. He stops for a moment on the side street to see why a crowd has gathered away from the parade. Will there be a Southern Baptist preacher there to point him to life? Will you have the joy of hearing that old gentleman—far older than his forty years—say “Thank you. Thank you for saving my life and giving me something for which to live?”

Oh, but wait, please tarry. Do you see her there? The little ten-year old girl from Sierra Leone? Of course, you cannot miss her as she holds up the two scab-covered wrists where only weeks before two precious little black hands were attached. She holds them up to you not to blame you for the barbarous act of an unregenerate heart that hacked them off two weeks ago to render her helpless and to inspire terror. She lifts them rather to say that if she has any hope it is that you would have mercy on her. For a moment we avoid eye contact with her lest our own guilt engulf us. But finally we must face those sad eyes that just days before sparkled with life and hope. Without her hands, it is doubtful that she will survive in Africa—a brutal fact that she knows only too well. Can you sleep well tonight oblivious to her plight? Can you push her face and stubs from your mind? Is it fine with you if, having lost her hands, she loses her soul also?

My fellow Southern Baptists, may I borrow but one final moment for your reflection? We are appointed ambassadors for Christ, and we must fulfill this embassy because of our appearance at the *bema*. But there is a still more compelling rationale—the love of Christ constraineth us! See, yonder where the road to Damascus emerges from the walled city of Jerusalem. Behold the rowdy insensitivity of a blood-thirsty mob. Feel the sharp slippery stones of the Roman pavement through your sandals reminding you of the precarious nature of every one of life's steps. Smell the stench of a place of frequent executions and watch with terror as three new crosses are raised at Golgotha. Come with me as we push our way through the gawking crowd until miraculously we stand at the foot of the central cross. Now, lift your eyes and look into the face of constraining love!

Wait! He speaks to a woman—a mother weeping uncontrollably at your side. She cannot fathom why her Son, the gentlest and most generous man she had ever known, must die ignominiously in the vigor of His youth. Concerned only for others, listen as He says tenderly to His mother, "Mother, behold your son," and to John, "Behold your mother."

We stand quietly weeping, perplexed by the contradictions of all that we see when suddenly we are shaken to our extremities by a desperate, wrenching, choking plea from the cross on the left, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Instinctively we look at that lonely, dying brigand, but quickly turn back to the central figure. Though every movement inflicts increasing agony, He turns His head slightly, and with difficulty, flexes swollen eyelids to gain brief eye contact with the object of His passion. Parched lips, which only moments before had cried out in thirst, purse themselves in the hint of a heavenly smile, and He who is the master of the still small voice whispers to that felon, "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

Can you believe it? A skull-laden tribunal of execution has been transformed into a proscenium to Paradise. Above the shouts of a derisive mob, we hear the rustle of angels' wings. The executioner's cross has become a bridge to glory. For that guilty vagabond, the scene at his feet is suddenly blurring. There is a shout of triumph from the man hanging on the central tree, "*Tetelesthai*"—It is finished. The malefactor exhales a final trembling breath—and before Him stands the figure on the central cross. A city of incredible radiance and beauty stretches into eternity behind the Lord of glory. A voice like the sound of many waters rumbles through the new Jerusalem, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter into my glory!" And glory, the angels of God are shouting antiphonally across the arch of the heavens, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!"

Suddenly a thief who had perhaps never sung before finds a voice of praise and unites with a heavenly choir of the redeemed, the twenty-four elders, the four living creatures; with Abraham, Isaac, and Israel; with Moses, David, and Elijah; with Peter, James, and John as they lift the refrain:

Jesus paid it all,  
All to Him I owe;  
Sin had left a crimson stain,  
He washed it white as snow.

And a solitary elder in a lyric tenor voice confesses,

Lord, now indeed I find Thy pow'r,  
And Thine alone,  
Can change the leper's spots  
And melt the heart of stone.

And the chorus of heavenly elders chimes as they cast their victor's crown at the feet of the Lamb,

For nothing good have I  
Whereby Thy grace to claim;  
I'll wash my garments white  
In the blood of Calv'ry's Lamb.