

FRINGE BENEFITS

By

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As we wrote in the first issue of the WITNESS, “The destiny toward which a person is working generally furnishes him with the motive that drives him toward it. The nature of that destiny will also help him determine the principles and means to be employed in arriving.” Nowhere is this more applicable than in Christian faith.

In any effort there is a basic issue which must be kept in focus if the entire effort is not to become distorted and wasted. Then there are the “fringe benefits” which may be byproducts or constructive helps relative to the main issue. For example in building our nation there was the core of law and order, the constitution, which guaranteed protection and certain rights to the individuals. Then there were the fringe benefits such as social agencies, schools and etc., which are not the main issue but either derive from it or help it along.

Since government bureaus, set up as helps, and social welfare agencies, by-products of government, have become ends in themselves to millions of people who are directly affected the original idea of constitutional government is largely forgotten. And once the main issue is lost, all the benefits will be lost too.

And this happens in religion, too. It has already happened for millions.

God had a definite thing in mind when He created the heavens and the earth and placed man in the earth, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Genesis 1:28). The fact that God gave certain direct commands to the man he had made before that man had ever sinned and fallen from God's fellowship indicates that God had a purpose and goal for man in his perfect and sinless state. There is nothing in Scripture to indicate that God ever changed His mind from the original purpose: to have man in His own image in a perfect creation of earth. The fact that man sinned and lost his place of dominion and right to life does not alter the original eternal purpose and desire of God.

This continuing purpose is revealed by Jesus in the many statements he made concerning the fact that He came into the world to redeem man. Jesus taught that God desires to bring “the prodigal” back to the original home. It was Jesus who said that the meek “shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). Through His miracles of raising the dead and through His own resurrection He demonstrated God's intention to raise up man in a bodily state, quite fitted for life on the “new earth.”

Peter preached the “restoration of all things whereof God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets that have been from of old” (Acts 3:21). Throughout the prophetic books there

is pictured a perfect never-ending life on earth, reminiscent of that original Eden with which God began, and which is described in symbolic terms in the last chapters of the Revelation.

Paul wrote of the “hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:21). Here we see the ultimate ideal of God's creation in its glory, where redeemed man in God's likeness can live and hold dominion. This is the message of Peter in which we are reminded of the destruction of this present world as we know it, but „according to his promise we look for a new heavens and a new earth in which dwells righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13).

This overall purpose of God in winning back a world of men to carry out His original purpose is at the same time a thrilling prospect for the future as well as a challenging incentive for our lives right here and now. It constitutes the core of Christianity. Of course the means of winning back the world to God is what we call the “gospel” — the good news of the atonement of Christ and His resurrection back to life.

But the church (and I speak in the general sense) has become of concerned with the by-products and the constructive helps that the purpose is all but lost.

For example Sunday church attendance, a constructive help to the goal, for many has become the end in itself. While one's attention to worship indicates his concern for God's purpose and is essential to it, it is by no means the end nor the goal. In the worship service itself some become so engrossed in the mechanics and performance of the acts that the ultimate goal is lost to view. They quarrel over whether to play or not to play musical instruments, whether or not to wear choir robes, or even whether or not it is permissible to have a choir. One wonders what these things have to do with attaining the final and eternal goal of dominion over God's earth!

Other issues which often occupy the attention of the church are just as irreverent to the ultimate purpose of God. The name on the church door, for instance. Whatever the label on the door, if the members on the inside do not hold to the main issue and have the desire to fulfill God's purpose, the name is worthless.

The believer is thrilled over the by-products of pursuing God's purpose. It brings peace and joy and provides him with the “experience” of fellowship with Christ. It assures him of God's daily provision, and the answer to prayers. But to pursue any of these benefits for themselves alone is to miss the whole works!

The ordinances of baptism and communion are means by which we appropriate the benefits of the purpose of God, but to participate in them as mere legal duties without faith in the ultimate objective of God robs the sacred ordinances of their significance.

Even the morals and ethics taught in the Bible, when divorced from the basic purpose of God, become just so many burdens added to man who is already staggering under his

load. The pleasures which we receive now as benefits of the faith, when separated from the core of Christianity, become so many frills in competition with the passing pleasures of the world. And there is a real danger in many people today thinking that they are “in the faith” just because they engage in some of the fringe benefits of Christianity. They may enjoy these blessings (but not fully) and yet lose the ultimate gift of life in the kingdom.

Oddly enough many even hold forth the helps and byproducts as the basic issue, and leave the main purpose on the fringe of their faith. For example they dogmatically hold “tithing” to be essential, but hope in the resurrection of the dead is left as a matter of opinion. The death of Christ and its benefits can be held as a mystery, but the pattern and tradition of a church service must be held to the letter!

What God eternally purposed to do, He will do. Redeeming the race of man from death in order to have him in “dominion” over His creation is the main issue of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. It is the main issue of all history. It is the main issue today. While science searches and philosophy speculates, the world speeds on toward the consummation of the age when God will judge and destroy the world of unbelievers and then create anew that which He designed for the habitation of men who have faith. In view of this the main effort of God, the whole church ought to concentrate upon it that it “might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Ephesians 3:10-11).

“Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe” (Hebrews 12:28).

JUST FOR YOU–TH

Another milestone! This is what millions of youth will be reminded of in the coming weeks, at the time of graduation. Perhaps the longest mile of all is that first graduation exercise, from the elementary school, in most places the “8th grade graduation.” These kids have been at it for 8 years. Actually they have been working at this from the start, for 13 or 14 years, and probably none of them will ever have such a long pull as this again, in education. So it is a big thing, and **I CONGRATULATE YOU.**

From Commencement speakers you will be hearing again the fact that this is not the end, but only the beginning. It's funny how this has to be repeated over and over for every class. But it does. The trouble is that most of us want to be advanced along the line of growth, but we don't want to pay the price for it. One wants to be grown up, but not grown up to the point of accepting grown-up responsibilities. And this is the real hitch in this whole business of passing milestones. Every milestone marks a stage of advancement, but also sets the stage for greater responsibility.

But it's a nice arrangement at that. Think what a shock it would be if suddenly, without any warning and without any preparation for it at all, you were suddenly to have to take on the responsibility of a family, providing all needs and making the big decisions in your community. The way some kids complain about parental discipline you would think it would be a grand thing to be all on your own, making all your own decisions. But that isn't the way we look at it when it actually happens. We consider it a tragedy for a youth to be suddenly burdened with problems for which he is not trained.

So it's better one milestone at a time. Some animals reach maturity in 2 years, and some even in a few months or even weeks. But then cows and mice are not honored with the right to reason and to become kingly creatures in the image of God. God has given man the privilege of reaching out in all directions to solve earth's mysteries and develop its resources. But it takes some doing to develop the responsibility required of one who is to have "dominion over the earth." So our all-wise God has designed such responsibility to come in these manageable milestone stages.

But some will assume an attitude of maturity when they are unequal and unwilling to assume the responsibilities. We call such a person "irresponsible." It's one of the saddest sights in the world to see a person who has attained the years of maturity but not the training. He thinks he is "grown" because he has lived the right number of years, but his milestones were measured only in years and not in experience.

Now that you have reached that milestone – another year of school behind you – go ahead and take the next logical step to the level of responsibility. Technical knowledge, scientific discovery and economical change all challenge you NOW. But the greatest challenge of all is from God. His challenge says for you to be a responsible member of your home, accepting the training and the blessings as well as contributing your love and labor. His challenge says for you to accept responsibility in His Kingdom, seriously studying His word and faithfully bearing a witness to His purpose.

When you take this step of responsibility to God, then you have really begun.

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