

LET'S BE HONEST@
Evangelist Johnnie Lavender
I Cor. 1:17-25

This may sound like a rather unusual request, but I want you to be honest, even though honesty can hurt at times. A preacher was making his announcements and said, **A**The board will meet in my study for a few minutes after the service.**@** Promptly after the benediction, a stranger made his way to the designated place. **A**Were you looking for someone?**@**the minister asked. **A**No, I was told to come here.**@** **A**By whom?**@**asked the parson. **A**By you,**@**came the reply. **A**I asked you?
When?**@** **A**You asked for the board to meet, and if anyone was ever bored, I was!**@**

Well, this evening, painful as it may be, I want you to be honest. I want you to be honest with God, and I want you to try very hard to be honest with yourself. It's possible, of course, for you to fool me. You can fool your family and friends. You even fool yourself. That's why I'm earnestly asking you to set aside any mask, or cloak of pretense you may be wearing, and let's be honest.

Forget about what I think of you. Don't bother about the opinion of the one sitting next to you. In so far as it is possible, lay aside your own preconceptions, and be honest, with me, with yourself and God.

In my training for the ministry I selected a dual major -- philosophy and psychology. In psychology we discussed the great motivating forces and factors in human life, the psychological drives which cause people to live and act as they do. And I have been impressed, as I have tried to stay abreast of the latest psychological insights, that today, as yesterday, the supreme urge, the one almost universal desire upon the part of most people, the great motivating factor in human life is a desire for happiness.

Folks may call it by various names. Self-realization. Personality integration. You name it. Ultimately it resolves itself into a desire to be happy.

But happiness is a nebulous thing. It can mean almost anything to anybody, and usually does. But, generally speaking, there are three common ingredients most folks think of when they think of happiness. Serenity. Security. And success.

Serenity, or peace of mind and a clear conscience. Security, or a feeling of adequacy. Success, or the satisfaction of real achievement. These are those things which most people have in mind when they speak of happiness. And, whether they realize it or not, every man, woman, boy or girl has some philosophy of life by which they are attempting to achieve these mystical goals. It is this philosophy or set of attitudes, which makes them tick. Which provides the motivating force governing their actions. And, in the light of your desire for happiness, AWhat makes you tick? By what philosophy of life are you living in order to achieve your goal?

Serenity

As you look at it honestly, as you put your attitude or philosophy of life to the test, does it first of all, provide you with serenity. Does it give you any real peace of mind? Does it satisfy your conscience?

And, oh, what pain there is at times in the human conscience. Conscience may be dulled. It may be seared. It may be mis-taught. But there comes an hour when conscience makes a serious and terrible cry.

As George Truett pointed out, AThe reason the writings of the great dramatists, Shakespeare and George Elliot and Victor Hugo, and men and women of their caliber live on, while ten thousand

piles of trashy literature die, is that they have recognized the power of the human conscience.

ATake Macbeth,@Truett says. ASee the effort made there to get the blood off the hands. See him as he washes them again and again. Hear the pitiful wail as the hands are lifted up with the cry
Oh, the blood, the blood. Though I lave here in this basin, I cannot get it off!= And if a

philosophy of life does not satisfy the conscience and give peace of mind, it can never provide true happiness. @

Security

And then there is the second test. Does that which makes you tick give you security? Will it give you a sense of assurance when you face death? Even more pertinent, will it give you confidence to stand in the judgment unafraid?

Third, does it give you success? Not in sense of acquiring material possessions, of stocking up more and more of the things you need less and less. But, does it help you live a better, higher, nobler life. Does it make you a finer man or woman, boy or girl? That which makes you tick, does assurance give you success? These are the tests to which I ask you to honestly put your philosophy of life, your scheme for living, this evening.

Personal Merit

There are four prominent attitudes or philosophies by which non-Christians live today. The first is this, All is okay the way I am. I am a good, moral person. I abide by the laws of society. I live a circumspect life. I don't need Christ. I am ready to meet God as I am. @ Is that your position? If so, let's be honest. Let's measure it in the light of the tests I've just mentioned.

First -- does it satisfy your conscience? Now, be honest. Remember, you can fool me. You can fool others. But you can't fool God. Be honest. Does it really satisfy your conscience to say, **ANo** matter what the Bible teaches, regardless of what Jesus said, even though he died to seek and to save sinners, I am good enough as I am without him? @ Does that satisfy your conscience? Really? It wouldn't satisfy mine.

What about the next test? Does it make you a better person to say, **All** good enough already? @ Is it apt to help you reach a higher pinnacle of personal achievement to say, **All** make it on my own, thank you. I am good enough as I am? @

Or take the next test. Will it give you security in that hour when you face death? When the doctor says, **A**We've done all we can. Do you have a pastor?@ Can I ask, will it make the pillow softer? Will it make the burden lighter to say, **A**Well doctor, I've lived a circumspect life. I don't need Christ. **I**ll meet God as I am. Will you be able to smile at your loved ones then? As you face death and say **A**I'm good enough?@

And what about that great test I haven't mentioned yet? When you stand before the judgment, when you face the absolute and undefiled perfection of God's eternal holiness, will it give you any security then to say, **A**I'm here, but **I**'m here without Christ, **I**'m good enough without him!@

Do you think for one minute any poor sinner would ever make such a presumptuous plea at the great white throne? Never! And because of that, and its failure to pass the other tests, the foolish philosophy of personal merit can never lead anyone to true happiness.

Other People's Badness

So let's take another of the popular positions held by non-Christians today, here's a person who says, **A**Oh, **I**'m not good enough as I am. In fact, **I**'m not very good at all and **I**ll admit it. But then, **I**'m no worse than most of the people in and out of churches, so **I**ll just take my chances with the rest of them.@ This is not a philosophy of your own goodness, but of the other fellow's badness. And if this is a variation of your point of view, then let's be honest. Let's see how it measures up in the light of the tests.

Does it satisfy your conscience? Does it help to say, **A**I'll not bother about Jesus and his claims to be Savior because the rest of the gang is doing the same thing? **I**ll ignore him. **I**ll put him off, because others are doing it, too?@

Will it satisfy your conscience to say that, when you pillow your head tonight and look up into the blackness of the sky? Will it give you any peace of mind then to say, **A**I'll take my chances with

the rest of them. @

Or does it make you a better person to say, **A**I'm as good as a lot of other people, even church people. **I**ll let it go at that. @ Will it help you be a success in the sense of personal achievement if you follow that practice in life? If you say, **A**Everyone else is shaving the corners on the cubes of truth, so **I**ll do it too? Everyone else is looking for an angle, so **I**ll find one too? @ Is that the way you want to live? Let's be honest, if you follow that attitude to its logical conclusion, will it really lead to real happiness?

Or move on to the third test. When you face the black specter of death, will it give you any satisfaction to say, **A**Hundreds of others have died without Christ. **I**ll go the way they did. @ Will it give you the deep sense of soul security for which you are longing to let it go at that?

Will it help you in the judgment when God says, **A**What did you do with Jesus? @ And you answer, **A**I put him out of my life. @ And God asks, **A**Why? @ And you reply, **A**Because so many others were doing it! @ Be honest, my friend. Can you really find happiness in such a pagan philosophy? I seriously doubt it.

Outright Disbelief

So let's move on to the third philosophy which is outright disbelief. Here's a chap who says, **A**Frankly, I don't believe a word of the gospel. I admit to being an outright, downright disbeliever. I reject it all! @

Well, let's look at that. Can you find the happiness for which you long in such a philosophy? David Hume, the world famous skeptic, couldn't. He spent his life making a mockery of the scriptures. He found untold delight in reviling the name of Jesus. And yet on his death bed he was forced to say, **A**I am overwhelmed and confounded with the forlorn solitude in which I am placed by my philosophy. When I turn my eye inward, I find nothing but doubt and ignorance. Where am I, and what? I begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable . . . confined in the deepest darkness. @

No, my friend, disbelief will not satisfy the conscience. Nor will it make you a better person. Nor will it help you in the hour of loneliness, when you face death. It failed to satisfy Lord Byron who wrote, **A**The worm, the canker, and the grief are mine alone.**@** And, my friend, it will not satisfy you.

No, nor will it help you in the judgment. When you face the living proof of God's eternal truth, it will not help you then to flaunt your disbelief. Rather, with Voltaire, the infidel, you are more likely to cry, **A**Would that I had never been born!**@** Let's be honest, friend, the key to happiness is not found in the philosophy of disbelief.

A God of Love Won't Send Folks to Hell

And when you think it through long enough and far enough, neither is happiness found in the fourth major attitude of non-Christians, which is, **A**God is a God of love. It doesn't matter how I act down here, for surely a God of love will not send anyone to hell.**@** Is that your position? Then, one last time, let's be honest. Will it meet the test?

Let's set aside the Bible for a moment, for while the Bible speaks clearly on all these points, perhaps you object to that appeal to authority. So let's rely upon your reason alone, for just a moment.

Does it satisfy your conscience to say that vice and virtue shall receive the same reward? Does it give you peace of mind to know that the sweet soul who loves and serves God faithfully, is going to receive no more or less, than the one who plays fast and loose with the commandments of God? Does it satisfy your conscience to believe they will both receive the same reward?

Does it make you a better person here and now to say, the good, the bad, the indifferent are all going into heaven? Is that the kind of inspiration you need to become the person you were meant to be?

And how about the third test? If you were to look back upon a life of moral license and submission to the flesh, could you die in peace with no regrets? And then, when you face the judgment, and meet the Christ that dies on the cross so that you might live, do you think it will give you any security then to say, **A**Jesus, I lived and taught that it didn't matter how I behaved on earth, for it would be all right up here.®

Isn't it true, my friend, that it defies all reason to hold such a view as that? You do violence to all the laws of logic when you deny the truth that **A**as a man soweth, so also shall he reap.® Sow wheat, reap wheat. Sow corn, reap corn. Sow sin, reap the wages of sin, in time and in eternity! Just as there's a law of physical gravity which says what goes up must come down, so, too, there's a law of spiritual gravity, which says that as the seed is sown, so shall the harvest be.

So where are we? The answer is, nowhere! There is no philosophy of men sufficient for the human soul. What then shall we do? Is there no door of hope in the valley? Is there no gateway through which a man or woman aware of his or her need, can pass? Must we say with Byron, **A**The worm, the canker and the grief are mine.®

No! Thank God, there is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin sick soul. There is an all sufficient refuge for you and me, and that refuge is Christ. And once again I say to you, let's be honest. Let's put him to the test. Let's subject Jesus to trial, and see if he passes with flying colors.

Put him to the test of conscience, and Jesus says, **A**My blood forgives and sets you free.® You long for serenity and peace of mind? Then hear the precious promise, **A**Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.® Of all the other philosophies we have had to say, **A**Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.® But of the promise of Christ, we can say with great gladness of heart. **A**Veरity of verities. All is verity.® Yes, Christ satisfies the conscience and gives peace of mind.

And the same must be said of the test of success. Can you tell me of anyone who has ever helped more people to live better and nobler lives, than the lonely Nazarene? It is said that Dannecker, the German sculptor, spent eight years producing a face of Christ. At long last he achieved one in which the emotions of love and sorrow were so perfectly blended, those who looked upon it were moved to tears. Subsequently he was asked to use his great talent on a statue of Venus, and he replied, **A**fter gazing so long into the face of Jesus, do you think that now I can turn my attentions to a heathen goddess?@ And beloved, that's the secret to a better life. That's the cleansing, redeeming power of a new affection. A love affair with Jesus.

But more than that, I say to you that if you also put Christ to the test of death, you will be able to rest securely, knowing that in that hour he will be your all-sufficient refuge. Toynbee, undoubtedly the greatest historian of modern times, a man who examined the qualifications of all the founders of the world's religious faiths, wrote triumphantly in his masterpiece The History of the World, **A**God incarnate in human flesh, Jesus of Nazareth, alone conquers death. @ Yes, Jesus meets that test.

But there is even more to be said, for when you put him to the final test, the test of judgment, his true grace and greatness are seen, as the heavens themselves exclaim, **A**ll hail the power of Jesus' name. @ For Christ's promise is sure, **A**He that confesses me before men, him will I confess before my Father in heaven. @

No wonder, Michaelangelo, the master artist of the ages should be heard to say in his 80th year, **A**Painting and sculptor's aid in vain I crave, my one sole refuge is that love divine, which from the cross stretched forth its arms to save. @

My friend, let's be honest. Do you want true happiness? Then look to Jesus for real serenity, true success, and lasting security. The qualities of which happiness is made are gained only through a personal relationship with Jesus.

ADo you want joy, real joy, wonderful joy?

Let Jesus come into your heart.
Your sins he'll wash away,
Your night he'll turn to day,
Your life he'll make it over anew.
Do you want joy, real joy, wonderful joy?
Let Jesus come into your heart. @

Christianity invites us to employ the scientific method of demonstration, or personal experience. And, if you ask this morning, **A**Can I prove the truth of Christianity for myself? @ my reply is, **A**Yes, you can. @ The best angle by which to measure anything is the **A**try-angle. @ So let's be honest. Put Christ to the test. Give him an opportunity to prove himself to you. I promise, it will be well with your soul.

AThe world is weary of new tracks of thought
that lead to naught,
Sick of quack remedies prescribed in vain
for mortal pain.
But still above them all one figure stands
with outstretched hands.
One message stands above the strife.
I am the way, the truth, the life. @

Come. Taste. And see that the Lord is good!