

tracts and knocking on doors to going off to a foreign mission to evangelize (and often coming back disappointed, discouraged and questioning one's faith). The result is that ministries multiply in the church, with ministers of music, ministers of the singles, children's ministers, youth ministers, etc., and the members of the church are left thinking that, if they do not have some "ministry," they are second-class members of the church.

Forgotten is the important biblical truth that the church has but one ministry, the preaching of the gospel. Paul says of himself, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:18). To Timothy, he says, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (II Tim. 4:2).

Forgotten too is the scriptural injunction that those who preach the gospel must be sent as Paul himself was sent (Acts 13:1-3): "And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom. 10:15). Such sending is by God through the church and involves the laying on of hands or ordination by the church.

Also forgotten, to the detriment of marriage, home and church, is the truth that we are called to serve God first in the place He has given us, as husbands and wives, parents and children, those who are busy with our daily work, whatever that may be. Paul, who may well have been dealing with something like we see today, says, "Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God" (I Cor. 7:24). If I am married and have children, my first and greatest responsibility is to my wife and family, and I may not neglect those responsibilities for some "ministry."

Not only that, but I must understand that it is in the place and calling God has given me that I am the best witness for Christ. Especially in a society where marriage means nothing, where family life is a disaster and where honest daily labour is a lost art, my faithfulness in those areas is a better witness than knocking on doors will ever be.

I must understand also that the Reformation view of work teaches that all the work of a believer, the work of a mother in the home, the work of a father for the support of his family, all work, no matter how unimportant and menial it may seem, is blessed by God and used by Christ for God's glory, for the edification and salvation of others, and for our own peace and contentment. A mother need not think that washing dishes and laundering clothes is beneath her, and that she needs a "ministry" of some kind to find satisfaction and fulfilment, but she must know that Christ makes her work His own, blesses it and uses it for good beyond any expectation. That is why the Word in I Corinthians 7:24 adds, "with God," and why Paul exhorts us, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (15:58). The work of the Lord is not only preaching and witnessing, but mowing lawns, taking out the rubbish, pounding nails, doing accounts, when it is done for Christ, with prayer and in faith.

I have strayed somewhat from friendship evangelism, but I trust our readers will excuse me and wait for more on that subject in the next issue.

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"Life on Life" and "Feel Good" Ministries

One reader of the *News* has sent the following request: "I'd like to ask if something can be written on the comparison and/or contrast between friendship with the world which is enmity with God and friendship with unbelievers as a bridge-building exercise for sharing the gospel (Life on Life and Word of Witness)."

The main concern here is what is called "friendship evangelism" but, first, a bit about Life on Life and Word of Witness. The former, Life on Life Ministries, is connected with Perimeter Church in Georgia in the United States. I am not sure to what the inquirer was referring by Word of Witness, since I could find no references to it. I assume it is another organization similar to Life on Life.

Life on Life and such organizations are typical of much of what goes under the name of Christianity today. The focus is on self and self-fulfilment, on feeling useful and good, on personal satisfaction and happiness. Almost nothing is said about sin and grace, and salvation through faith alone in Jesus. Life on Life's website recommends one of its founder's books thus: "Are you frustrated that your life lacks lasting satisfaction? We live in a time when people are searching for meaning, purpose and satisfaction, and are frustrated, disappointed and disillusioned by the counterfeits that hold out the promise but fail to deliver. This lack of satisfaction crosses all ages, ethnicities and beliefs. It is not uncommon to speak with individuals who claim to have strong, spiritual lives but yet do not know how one lives a life of satisfaction. In 'The Answer,' Randy Pope invites us to discover a greater purpose and more fulfilled life." Though Christ is mentioned on the website, I could not find a single reference to sin and salvation. Life on Life is just another "feel good" ministry and gospel, which is no gospel at all.

These organizations can hardly be called Christian. They are all about personal fulfilment and self-satisfaction, and do not even make a pretence of preaching the gospel of grace. They can be criticized on many points: their lack of regard for what the Bible says about ministry and the calling of those who bring the gospel, their skewed view of satisfaction and personal happiness, their misunderstanding of our spiritual need and their emphasis on feelings, but the main problem with these "ministries" is that they have no gospel, and pay only lip-service to Christ and His saving work.

The mention of an organization such as Life on Life Ministries gives me the opportunity to write about something that has long troubled me and is a problem not only in these "feel good" ministries but also in evangelical churches. I am referring to the notion that everyone in the church, every Christian, has to have a ministry of some kind in order to feel fulfilled. A person's ministry may be anything from passing out

The Unchangeable God (2)

Besides specific Bible texts—Psalm 102:27, James 1:17 and Malachi 3:6 were cited in the last issue of the *News*—there is especially one divine name which teaches God’s immutability. Do you know which it is? *Jehovah!*

The noun Jehovah is from the Hebrew verb that means “to be.” It is the divine name that the angel of the Lord explained to Moses at the burning bush on Mount Sinai: “I AM THAT I AM” (Ex. 3:14). You and I could never say this about ourselves without the grossest idolatry; the angel Gabriel could not say this; no creature could ever truly say this. Only Almighty God can and does! He is ever and always Himself. Eternally, He is exactly what He was and is and shall be: the self-existent, absolute and unchangeable “I AM THAT I AM.”

Now let us relate this divine name to the three texts mentioned earlier. “For I am the LORD [i.e., Jehovah, the immutable I AM THAT I AM, therefore], I change not” (Mal. 3:6). Concerning Himself, as Jehovah, He says, “I AM THAT I AM,” and the church responds with worship, “thou art the same” (Ps. 102:27)! As Jehovah, the One who always and forever is exactly what He is, James 1:17 rightly calls Him, “the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”

Besides particular verses of Scripture (especially the three that are mentioned twice above) and the divine name Jehovah, there is one image or figure used of God that especially involves His immutability: He is the *rock*. As David says, “The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower” (Ps. 18:2)—to cite just one instance from God’s Word. Our covenant Lord is firm, constant, strong, dependable, faithful, unmovable and unchangeable, like a rock!

Our God is not a chameleon that changes with its surroundings. He is not a weathervane that moves with the wind. “He is the [immutable] Rock,” and all His “work” and “ways” are “perfect,” “just” and “right” (Deut. 32:4).

Let me give you one very simple argument that demonstrates why the Most High must be, and is, unchangeable. If something changes, it must change either for the better or for the worse. But God cannot change for the better for He already is absolutely perfect. Nor can He ever change for the worse because then He would be less than perfect.

In short, the truth of God’s immutability is an absolutely necessary truth, included in the very idea that Jehovah is infinitely glorious. Thus that which is not unchangeable is not God. So when the true God revealed Himself to Moses, He said, “my name [is] JEHOVAH” for “I AM THAT I AM” (Ex. 6:3; 3:14)!

In what is God unchangeable? He is unchangeable in Himself. This includes, first, His being unchangeable in His Persons. Jehovah is Triune, existing in three divine Persons, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, who are equal in power and glory, dwelling in the bliss of covenant fellowship forever.

God did not become Triune at creation or with the incarnation of the Son or at Pen-

tecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the New Testament church of Christ. God exists in three Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—eternally and immutability, as He says, “For I am the LORD, I change not” (Mal. 3:6).

Second, God is unchangeable in his attributes or virtues. He does not change with regard to time, for He is eternal, or space, for He is omnipresent. He does not increase or decrease in knowledge for He is omniscient. He does not become stronger or weaker for He is omnipotent. He does not grow or diminish in anything for He is infinite. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* sums up the truth: “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and *unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth*” (A. 4). We repeat with awe the inspired words, “thou art the same” (Ps. 102:27)!

In our day, over against all forms of Arminianism, it especially needs to be stressed that God is immutable in His love and mercy. It is certainly not the case that God loves someone in time but then, when he dies, He hates him and casts him into hell forever!

Those whom God loves, He loves eternally and unchangeably. As Psalm 136 declares an emphatic 26 times, “his mercy endureth for ever.” Repeatedly we are called to give Jehovah thanks, for He “smote Egypt in their firstborn ... [and] overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea ... [and] slew famous kings ... Sihon king of the Amorites ... [and] Og the king of Bashan” (10, 15, 18, 19, 20). Why? “for his mercy endureth for ever”! There is no mercy for Pharaoh, Sihon, Og and their idolatrous people, whom He destroyed. Jehovah has everlasting mercy for His elect people in Jesus Christ and shows this by slaying their impenitent enemies.

Romans 8:38-39 is extremely forceful in teaching that nothing “shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” After listing nine of the leading candidates for effecting such a terrible separation, including “death,” it adds, as a sort of universal catchall, “nor any other creature.” God’s love is everlasting and invincibly adhesive, for we are united to Him forever! Again, we see that our comfort lies in the truth that our covenant Lord is “the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

Whom does the Most High love? He unchangeably loves Himself (as the highest good), His beloved Son incarnate and all His elect in Christ Jesus. He loves us unchangeably and He loves us “unto the end” (John 13:1)!

Just as Jehovah is unchangeable in His Persons and attributes, including His love and mercy, so He is also unchangeable in His blessedness. Never does God increase in His joy or happiness or pleasure for He is infinitely and immutably blessed in Himself. Never does the Most High become richer or more abundant in life for He is the fullness of perfection forever!

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