

## 3 Reasons For Having A Good Testimony

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**Bible Text:** 1 Peter 2:11-17

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We are turning tonight if you have your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter two, the second chapter of 1 Peter. We want to begin reading at verse 11.

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.<sup>1</sup>

Let's bow together as we ask the Lord's blessing on his Word.

*Our Father, we are praying now that you will open our minds and hearts to thy truth. We are thankful for the great multitudes who down through the centuries have given their lives to preserve this Word for us. We thank you for thy miraculous power intervening in the affairs of men to preserve it. And we pray that you will help us to honor this Word as it is in truth the Word of God. We pray, Father, that we might know what it means to search the pages of this book, to understand the information there and to hide it in our hearts that we might not sin against thee. And we ask for the spiritual wisdom that only comes to those who come to thee in child like simplicity. We pray that you will enable us to humble our hearts before thee that thy Word might have its way in our hearts to teach us, to enable us to see the snares of Satan, to see the misunderstandings of the human mind and heart and to see thy truth in all its fullness.*

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter 2:11-17.

*We are thankful for the promise that if any man lack wisdom he can ask of thee because you give to all men liberally and upbraid not. We are trusting now that this might be the case in this meeting this evening and we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.*

As we study again verse by verse through the book of 1 Peter we come to a distinct division in this second chapter. We find the apostle branching out into several new subjects. But there is an underlying theme which is the basis for the other ideas in this passage and that is the one we want to think about tonight.

We see the apostle talking about our life as strangers and pilgrims here in the world, about abstaining from fleshly lusts, about having a manner of life that is honest among the lost, about submitting ourselves to the laws that man makes, to kings, to governors, recognition of governmental authority. And the purpose of all these things as we see it in the language set forth here is that related to our testimony.

So as we go into this passage I believe that it would be profitable for us to think for just a few minutes about the meaning of the testimony. Perhaps the best way to do that would be to make a comparison.

There is a correlation between the way prayer works and the way testimony works. But it is usually true that people have given more thought to the subject of prayer than they have to the subject of testimony. I wonder if you have ever stopped to think about the reason for prayer. If God can do anything why doesn't he just go ahead and do it? If he is going to do what he wills to do, if he works all things after the counsel of his own will, why bother commanding us to pray?

The purpose of prayer is certainly not to get God to do what he doesn't want to do. It is not some kind of spiritual arm twisting to try to get the Lord to respond in a way that he doesn't want to respond. And yet the Bible clearly teaches that man can have an effect upon God in some means or method by believing prayer. The Bible clearly teaches that there is a relationship between what happens in the affairs of men and what comes before God in the way of petitions from his people.

George Mueller of Bristol England was a man who in the 1800s had a number of orphanages. And he was able to see miraculous blessing upon his orphanages through prayer. He was able to build many of them, care for the great multitudes of children.

If you read the writings of George Mueller you will find these very interesting things. Even though he had many orphanages, even though he helped many thousands of children, Mueller said that he did not believe that the primary ministry that the Lord had given him was orphans. He said that is the secondary consideration. He said his principle ministry was prayer. That was the personal ministry to which the Lord has called him.

Perhaps that is why instead of writing books on orphans and orphanages, he wrote books on prayer. Now it is hard to argue with a man that prayed an average of six hours a day

alone with God. You have to learn something in the midst of all that. And he learned many things and he accomplished many things. He knew what praying was all about.

There are many helpful ideas that can be learned from George Mueller's experience, reading the books that he wrote, but he made one statement that really sums up all that he learned about prayer in a life time of dealing with that subject. Mueller said that in the later years of his life he never prayed a single prayer that God didn't answer. And he said that the way that he did that was by never praying a prayer until he knew it was the will of God to pray it. Once the Lord convinced him that it was his will to do a certain thing, Mueller could then obviously pray in faith believing knowing that he would have it and, of course, he did have it.

John said in his first epistle that, "If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us."<sup>2</sup> We know that he hears us. We know that we have the petition that we desired of him.

Of course, if you are like me you are not that spiritual. You are not always able to discern the Lord's will on every subject so you end up praying for some things that you don't get.

The question still remains. If God can do anything, why does he bother with us? If he has this authority, this power, why command us to pray as a vital part of the Christian life?

I believe that there are three reasons, three reasons why God commands us as his people to pray.

Number one, the act of prayer focuses our attention on the Lord as the source of all blessing. The only source of true blessings.

Number two, prayer allows us to participate in the activities of God. We are laborers together with him and that bigger part of his work that we are praying about.

And, number three, when our prayers are answered that brings glory to the Lord. God receives glory when people pray. And he answers those prayers in response to that faith.

So these are the three reasons that God commands his people to pray. Number one, to focus their attention in him. Number two, to allow believers to participate in what he is doing. And, number three, as a testimony which glorifies the God who answers prayer.

They are very reasonable reasons when you stop to think about it without going over into the heresy that the prayers of believers are somehow something that takes away from the sovereignty of God.

Now I said all that about prayer to make a comparison to the subject that we are about to consider. Why should we have a testimony? Is it because without our shining testimony people will go to hell? Are there people standing on the brink of the lake of fire and

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<sup>2</sup> 1 John 5:14.

unless we in our magnificence suddenly draw them back by our wonderful testimony they are going to fall in any minute?

Of course that is not true even though you hear it preached like that sometimes.

Nobody is ever going to stand on the brink of the lake of fire and look into the face of God and say, "I wouldn't be going here. I wouldn't be going out into eternal punishment from which I can never come back if Kent Kelly hadn't been such a rotten despot."

There is not going to be anybody who says that. And yet that is usually the way we think about testimony. That is usually the way you hear it preached. It is true that the Bible says that a bad testimony can cause people to stumble. Stumbling is a rather temporary situation. The Bible teaches that a bad testimony can give occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. And that is true. And that is why we ought to have a good testimony.

But I am talking to you now about the long term consequences of a bad testimony. You see if you can find some in this book. They are not in there. A good testimony can help believers live the Christian life, give encouragement to it. A good testimony can help lost people get saved. The Bible gives us that idea. But you won't find in the Bible anybody losing their eternal soul because some disobedient Christian failed to pray for them. And you won't find anybody losing their eternal soul because a Christian was a bad testimony.

It is a sin not to pray as we should. It is a sin to be a bad testimony. But the first thing to be learned about both prayer and testimony is that the Bible emphasizes the positive and not the negative. The Bible is telling us in the case of both prayer and testimony how we can get in on this thing, how we can be participants in what God has provided as a part of our work to do with him and for him in the Christian life. God commands us to have a good testimony for the same three reasons that he commands us to pray.

Number one, in order to have a good testimony our attention has to be focused on the Lord. You can't have a good testimony unless your attention is focused on him.

Number two, as we demonstrate a good testimony, as we influence the lost to be saved and influence Christians to live the Christian life, we are participating in the work that God is doing. We are being laborers together with God.

And, number three, we have an opportunity to bring glory to God through our testimony.

The Lord Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."<sup>3</sup>

He was talking about how a good testimony, a consistent Christian life glorifies God.

You see it is just like witnessing. When you preach on witnessing it is possible to intimidate people. The way you do that is that you take a passage out of context from the

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 5:16.

book of Ezekiel and you say, “God is going to point you out as having bloody hands if you don’t warn sinners. One of these days he is going to require their soul of you.”

That preaches good, no doubt about it. I could preach you a sermon on that subject that would scare you half to death. But there is only one problem. I would be lying. I would be twisting the Scripture to say something that God does not say.

Now the Bible says that you don’t do evil that good may come.<sup>4</sup> Even for a good motive you don’t preach things that are not true to try to get people who don’t want to do a certain thing to do it anyway.

The only way that God could require someone else’s soul of you is to take your soul. And he is not going to do that if you are saved. I would be twisting the Scripture if I preached to you that he would do a thing like that.

God commands you to be a witness. He commands you to pray. He commands you to be a good testimony. All those things are part of the Christian life and if you don’t do those things faithfully, the Bible teaches that it will cost you eternal rewards. It will be a loss greater than you can imagine.

But I have no right to lie to you in the name of God in an effort to frighten you into doing those things. I have no business saying that the Bible says certain things about our responsibility to do this and be this when it is just simply not true.

I will give you an example concerning testimony. Samson is, without a doubt, the worst testimony in the Bible. You show me a Christian who has ever committed half the atrocities that Samson committed and I will eat every page of the book of Judges out of your Bible. I mean, you never heard of a Christian that did what Samson did.

If people go to hell because of the bad testimony of Christians, if people’s lives get messed up bad term because of the bad testimony of Christians, why did a God of love record in the Bible the acts of Samson? I mean, what is he trying to do to us? What is he trying to do to us to put in here this record of the horrible testimony of Samson? He didn’t have to include the life of Samson in the Bible.

How many people have gone to hell? How many Christians have been encouraged to do evil by the bad testimony of Samson? I will tell you how many, none. Not one person saved or lost has ever been harmed by seeing the life of Samson in the Bible. God wouldn’t have put it in there if would harm people.

And you know what Samson did. When Samson got angry, he would go out and kill hundreds of people in cold blood. This is the fellow who judged Israel for 20 years. Samson lied. He married a lost woman. He visited a prostitute. He set people’s property on fire. He got all messed up with Delilah. Samson was a Christian. God raised him up to lead the chosen people for 20 years.

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<sup>4</sup> See Romans 3:8.

Now Samson was the lead man. He was the judge, the representative of the Word of God over two million people. I wonder how many of their children went astray from the testimony of Samson. Samson was a testimony. He was a terrible testimony. How many young people in the camp of Israel grew up evil and lost because they saw the way Samson acted as a Christian? None. A grand total of zero because here is what you have to realize. Samson was a testimony. But the people who watched the life of Samson didn't learn his evil ways. The people who watched the life of Samson learned that God will not let his people do wrong and get away with it. Samson lied. He killed. He swapped women all around. He engaged in illicit sex. He destroyed God's property and man's property.

But what is his testimony? Did people learn to do evil from watching that? Of course not. They learned that God steps in to deal with ungodliness in the life of a Christian.

Each successive woman that Samson went to made him that much more miserable. Every lie that he told got him in deep. Samson had a rotten disposition. He had a miserable life. He had a ruined reputation and the enemies of God punched out his eyes and put him to hard labor. He ended up a suicide. That was Samson's testimony. And that is why his testimony is recorded in the Bible.

God will not allow his people to do wrong and get away with it.

Now listen to what I am saying to you. These verses here in 1 Peter deal with testimony. But if you don't know what a testimony is and how one works they won't mean anything to you when you start to think about them.

It is true that a bad testimony can cause people to stumble. But how long does it take you to stumble? Stumbling is a short term problem. And there is nothing in the Bible to indicate that a bad testimony will ruin somebody else's life or send people to hell forever.

I will admit that it would preach a lot better if it was in there, but it is not in there. In fact, the Bible teaches just the contrary, that a bad testimony very quickly becomes a warning to people as in the case of Samson.

God does not let people get away with willful rebellion. Sometimes it seems like he does in the short term. But no honest person looking at the life of Samson is going to be encouraged to practice fornication. No honest person looking at the life of Samson is going to be encouraged to swap women. No honest person looking at the life of Samson is going to be encouraged to lie or kill or destroy people's property. God has seen to that. And he saw to it by bringing to the life of Samson one judgment after another, one miserable situation after another that anybody with any common sense wouldn't want to be a part of.

And you name any sin that you want to. God does not let Christians get away with open rebellion against him.

Now if a person is lost, they are liable to do most anything. The Lord is liable not to step in at all in the life of a lost person.

But when people engage in that type of rebellion they don't influence anybody's life toward long term evil. They don't send anybody to hell. Just as in the case of Samson, people watching their bad testimony learn something. They learn if you do these things you end up miserable. You end up with a ruined reputation. You end up with a life that has no power of God in it. You end up mocked by the Lord's enemies and in many cases the scars of that rebellion against God continue right down to the day that you die. That is the ultimate testimony of anybody who ultimately rebels against God.

A person can only be a bad testimony up to a point and it is a very limited point. And then they become a testimony against themselves and against the life that they have chosen. They become a warning as to what God will do in the lives of those who reject his Word.

It is still true. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption."<sup>5</sup>

So we need to get this word testimony in proper perspective. God views testimony in a positive sense because it demands that we look to him, it allows us to join him in the work that he is doing and it brings glory to him.

Those who turn away from God in the path of rebellion might mess somebody up temporarily, might cause them to stumble in the short term, but very quickly these people become a witness against themselves and against the life that they have chosen. And those who are watching the situation are able to see very clearly what it has done to their fellowship with God and with other people. They don't want any part of that.

Sometimes people get me discouraged. I started thinking what a rotten testimony they are to me because they don't do what they are supposed to. That is a stumbling block. The devil tries to do that to encourage me to do wrong. Because then the Spirit of God steps in and he says, "You better remember that when you stand before God those people won't be anywhere around. You won't be able to find them at all. The message of my Word is that you are responsible to do right if nobody else does right. It doesn't matter what the people around you are doing. There are no eternal consequences in your life whatsoever. You cannot blame a soul, even the devil himself, as the source of your sin. Their testimony, the testimony of the people around you means absolutely nothing in the light of your responsibility."

God says, "I am not going to hold you responsible for their testimony to you, but I am certainly going to hold you responsible for your testimony to them."

Now the Bible is true. They can't do wrong and get away with it, but neither can you.

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<sup>5</sup> Galatians 6:7-8.

Now, let's see how Peter treats this matter of testimony here in 1 Peter chapter two and verse 11.

“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”<sup>6</sup>

In other words, do right, have a good testimony, but why?

Verse 12. “Having your conversation [or manner of life] honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.”<sup>7</sup>

And what did I tell you a few minute ago? One of the three reasons to have a good testimony is that it brings glory to God when people see it. That is what he said in verse 12. “Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.”<sup>8</sup>

When the Spirit of God visits the lost in convicting power they remember the good works of those who had a good testimony. That is what the day of visitation is talking about here. Even though in the past they may have spoken against you, they may have tried to disregard your life and your example, a good testimony is a convicting instrument. It causes people who are lost to reflect on what they have seen in the lives of those around them who claim to be a Christian. It is something that encourages those who are lost to be saved if there is some testimony there for them to believe.

In terms of a bad testimony when they see somebody doing evil, you know, you don't have to look very far around you in this world to find somebody doing evil. If you want to find some religious fellow who claims to be a Christian and yet drinks liquor and takes God's name in vain, you can find a couple of hundred of them up the street here at every major denominational church in this town. It is not hard to find somebody who claims to be a Christian and yet does wrong.

So when people are looking around at the wrong in the world, when they are looking around at all the sinners here and there and everywhere it doesn't really matter which sinners they are. They are just all a general blur of bad testimony.

The thing that affects people is a good testimony. God uses testimony in the positive sense, in the sense that we have an opportunity to be laborers together with God. Here he is out there trying to get people saved. Here he is working in their life. There is a day of visitation when he works in their heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. And if we have been a good testimony, if they know us and know our claim to know the Lord and they

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Peter 2:11.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Peter 2:12.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



have beheld our good works then the Lord uses that as a tool of conviction in the day of visitation.

Now look at verse 13.

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.<sup>9</sup>

And here, again, he is talking about a testimony. With well doing we put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. By that he is observing our life, seeing our testimony.

Verse 16. "As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God."<sup>10</sup>

That should be our testimony, that we are the servants of God. And all through these verses the underlying subject is presenting ourselves in such a way in these various contexts so that we might be a good testimony to the people around us.

Verse 17. "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king."<sup>11</sup>

He is talking there about how to have a good testimony. So the important thing to remember about testimony are these. A testimony is an opportunity just like prayer. God doesn't need our testimony. But he desires that we have one. He commands us to have one. The Lord can use us as a warning, as he did in the case of Samson. He can use our life in the negative sense to show people the consequences of rebellion if we want to turn out that way, if we want to be that kind of example to people. But testimony is an opportunity and its purpose is three fold. Number one, to focus our attention on the Lord who alone can give us a good testimony. Number two, to give us opportunity be laborers together with him as he encourages believers as he wins the lost. And, number three, to bring glory to himself as people look at our life and witness the good testimony that we have.

I think it is important in these verses and in numerous other passages in 1 and 2 Peter that we are going to be seeing, it is important to recognize that this business of testimony is a positive thing. It is not God telling us about how many people are going to go to hell if we are not a good testimony. It is an opportunity, an opportunity to do right, to work with the Lord in what he is doing, to glorify him. And rewards that are going to come from this are a result of the love that we have for the Lord.

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Peter 2:13-15.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Peter 2:16.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Peter 2:17.

One of the sad things that is going to occur when we get to the judgment seat of Christ is we are going to find out that there were a lot of tools used in preaching, there was an awful lot of psychology used on people. There are all kinds of programs instituted and pressures put on people's lives to get them to live for the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, you can take this book right here and you can really put the heat on people to do certain things in the name of God. You can take the Bible and twist it just a little bit and use it to put all kinds of coercion on people. Make them feel absolutely terrible if they don't give to the right collection in the right amount, if they don't witness the way they are supposed to when they are supposed to if they don't come to certain meetings at certain times.

But one of the sad days is going to be there at the judgment seat of Christ when people find out that all that stuff wasn't worth a hill of beans. Here they have gone out and put themselves into this regimen, this discipline because they are all intimidated by the people around them and the programs going on and what was said to them from the pulpit and so forth. And here are all these people out there doing things they didn't really want to do. But they would rather get with the program and do it than have people talk about them if they didn't.

Or they would rather give this amount of money so their name could be inscribed on a gold brick and put out in the church foyer so everybody could see it. Or maybe the memory of their loved ones could be perpetuated in stone, at least until the elements melt with fervent heat.

And all that stuff, you see, is wood, hay and stubble. It is going to be burned up. The only thing that is going to count in terms of your service for the Lord, the prayers you pray, the money you give, the work you do, the only thing that is going to count is what you do because you love the Lord, not what you do because somebody drug you into it or pushed you down a certain path. And anybody that tells you anything other than that is simply lying to you to accomplish their own purposes.

Now it would be a terrible thing for the Lord's work not to get done the way it ought to get done. I live with that every day. But an even more terrible thing would be for the Lord's work to get done by a bunch of hypocrites who are trying to please men and impress people and get some kind of personal recognition and acknowledgement and who don't really love the Lord at all.

I think if people don't love the Lord, they ought to know that about themselves. They ought to live under circumstances that eventually will bring them to the realization that that is the terrible destructive force in their life. Here they are claiming to be a Christian, don't half come to church, don't give anything to the Lord's work, don't care anything about the Lord's people. And one day that begins to dawn on a fellow and he says to himself, "You know, the Bible says that what you give to the Lord in the way of money proves the sincerity of your love."

And he starts looking back over what he has given to the Lord in the last year and he finds out that if the Bible is true there are some serious problems with his love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

When you witness to people do you do it because there is some kind of a sense of obligation? Are you scared if you don't do it somebody is going to go to hell? Nobody is going to trip into the lake of fire, falling over your ungodliness. God will see to that. If you won't do what he tells you to do, if you don't care enough about the Lord who died for you and bought you with his own blood to do what he tells you, he will find somebody else to take your place. You can be replaced in the work of God.

If you won't witness to your neighbor, the Lord will send somebody from down the street who loves him enough to do what he is supposed to do.

But there is some terrible deception going on. I am sure you know that if you have any discernment where people by means of programs and synods and drives for this, movements for that are pushed into doing things they never wanted to do, serving the Lord in a way they never would have served him if somebody hadn't been down their neck all the time trying to force them into doing what they didn't want to do in the first place.

So it is very important as we look at this matter of testimony to see that God wants us to have a good testimony. It is the great desire of his heart that we focus our attention on him, that we be laborers together in the work that he is doing, that we bring glory to his name. But the only incentive that is there, the only one is whether you love the Lord or not. If you don't care about having a good testimony because you love the Lord, you may as well not have one. You may as well be honest about your condition until you get saved or get right or get whatever it is you need to get.

It all comes back to the reality or the lack of it in our relationship to the Lord Jesus. Do you know him in truth? And because you know him, is that such a life transforming idea that it has caused you to be what you are in service to the Lord Jesus Christ? If that is not the basis for it you might as well be home watching television until you get convicted about your spiritual condition.

The Lord wants to do something for us. He want us to do something for him, but not by artificial means, not by some hypocritical show that we put on to impress people to make them think that we love the Lord when we don't.

So I hope you will think very carefully about the fact that you can't have a testimony until you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior. There is no escape from that. And if you do have a testimony it is going to be used of God in a way that is very profitable.

You know, I was talking to a young person some time ago. This teenager was having problems with a parent. Very sarcastically with the obvious implication the statement

was made, “Well, she claims to be a Christian,” talking about her mother. “And yet she does this and she does that.” All this was an explanation for the teenager’s rebellion.

I said, “Well, suppose your mother is not a Christian at all. Suppose that we can explain her actions by the fact that she thinks she is saved and she is not. How do we explain your actions? What kind of testimony have you been to her in this situation?”

You see the point is this. Testimony is important because you never know who you are dealing with. You don’t know the truth about anybody’s spiritual condition except your own. Somebody in your family, somebody in the church, they may have a bad testimony not because they are a terrible Christian, but rather because they have never become a Christian at all.

The Bible never asked you to define their spiritual condition. It asks about your salvation and your testimony so that you can be used of God in the life of that individual. So I am asking. Is your attention focused on the Lord? Has he given you a testimony as you labor together with him? Do your attitudes and your actions bring glory to God so that people looking at you can honestly conclude that the Lord Jesus Christ has saved your soul?

Let’s bow together as we pray.

*Our Father, we know that the great failures of our life often come from a lack of sincerity. First, lack of sincerity in facing up to the truth of thy Word, then in demonstrating that truth to those around us. We are asking you to help us to realize that when it comes to our testimony, to the work that we do for thee or fail to do, whether it be our witnessing or our labor or our attitude or our giving or whatever it is in the Christian life. Help us to see that the only honest evaluation of these things can come in the light of whether we love thee or whether we don’t. We are praying that you will help us to stand before the judgment seat of Christ knowing that we are saved because we are trusting in the blood and knowing that we will have something more than wood, hay and stubble because the life that we have lived here in the world has been lived without hypocrisy. We have been those who have been willing to forget about the evaluations, the accolades of men. We have been concerned about the condition of our heart before thee. We pray that you will help us to see these things truly in the light of thy truth and we pray it in Jesus’ name. Amen.*