

A Letter from a Missionary: Introduction & Clarification

This letter was originally written in 1994. The names of the missionaries, as well as any information regarding their place of service has been withheld, due to the "sensitive" location in which they serve.

Some parts of the letter have been slightly revised for the sake of clarity - with the approval of those who originally wrote it. The thoughts and intents of the authors remain unchanged.

Please note that the issue is *balance* and *priorities*. For instance, the author makes mention of:

...the commitments of men who are involved in a growing movement in America. These commitments are to pray, study God's word, love their families - and then keep their promises.

This, I believe, is a reference to an organization called "Promise Keepers." Now it's *not* that the author is "against" Promise Keepers - there are a lot of men (and women) who ought to learn to keep their promises, and the author would strongly agree with that. The issue is when commitment to family takes precedence over commitment to God. Sometimes the two *do* conflict. I have personally seen *many* instances in which people have used "family" as an excuse to avoid an obedience to God that they considered "uncomfortable."

So as you read this letter, interpret it based on this consideration.

- Dennis Hinks

A letter from a missionary

Dear Friends and Family,

During our 5 months here in the States we have had some great times visiting with many of you. We always appreciate people who ask questions about our daily lives and work in [a foreign city], language learning, the culture, the spiritual dilemma of [the] people, etc... One question that is sometimes asked is, "Now that we have returned to the States after being away, what do we see within the church that is out of focus?" We have thought quite a bit about this question and many of you have heard us speak on the issues relating to it. In this letter we would like to address the attitudes and thoughts that we have seen within the church which seem to us to be out of focus.

The Balanced Christian life?

The topic that we have spoken most frequently about since returning to the States in January has been the overwhelming attitude of selfishness within the church. It seems as though the "balanced" Christian life has become measured by how nice one can be while living for oneself. Our evangelistic cry to the unsaved has become, "See, I live just like you -- same material possessions, same selfish usage of time to do what I please, same attitude toward relationships (a focus what I can get out of them, and if the people are boring and rude, forget them!) -- and I'm a Christian! You can live just like me [no different from the rest of the selfish world] and be a Christian, too!"

Most of us wouldn't say that openly **but our lives show it**. The "balanced" Christian life has become the art of causing the least amount of ripples in our lives with family, friends and neighbors. At the same time we try to maintain the comfortable lifestyle we think every good red-blooded American, born on the fruited plain, has a "right" to.

Why are we out of balance? Because, "**Everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.**" (Phil. 2:21)

At times we might have twangs of guilt for not sharing Christ's Gospel to others. We might experience moments of sadness for people without Christ. Yet, our lives are largely unaffected by the COMMANDS of Christ to evangelize *where we are and beyond*.

Unless one believes a person has the opportunity to choose to follow Christ in Hell, those living without Christ have only till death to decide to follow him or **face eternal Hell**. We hold the Truth that sets people free. Yet it seems that we revise Psalm 119:11, from, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you," to, "I have hidden your word in my heart *so that no one will hear the good news!*"

Again, none of us would say it that way, but **our lives** seem to say it. This is the ultimate act of selfishness, *to keep from others the truth of Life from death, due to inconvenience, shame, embarrassment, etc...* Lifestyle evangelism seems to have taken an extreme route these days. While we do believe our lives should exemplify our message, we do **not** believe that we should love people TILL they ask us why! We should love people and *at the same time* tell them about the One who loves them more than WE ever could.

If you are like us, you have at times found Christ's commands burdensome. This is caused by us ordering our own priorities, and then trying to fit the commands of God into our lives where convenient. **It never works** because our affections contradict those of God's. We will most certainly fulfill our selfish desires first.

The truly balanced Christian life is fulfilled in us when the affections of God become **our** affections and our lives revolve around pleasing Him. When we are not doing this, we are loving ourselves more than God. Scripture says, "**This is love for God: to obey his commands.**" (1 Jn. 5:3) The verse goes on to say, "**And his commands are not burdensome.**" This will only be true when we put God's affections before our own.

Focus on the family?

Many have commented to us that they admire our decision to work in [a foreign country] with the poverty-stricken people of [the city]. Then they go on to say that their ministry, in contrast, is to "stay at home" (used in contrast to "sharing the gospel with others") and raise their family in this "evil world." They say that if they just "raise their family" (used in contrast to "sharing the gospel with others"), that will be a real accomplishment. Their plan is to raise their children up to be good, God-fearing people who will somehow give their lives to offering Christ to others.

This is mystifying to us as we have seen that **values are passed on by example**. If, as a parent, you give your life to offering Christ to others, your children will more likely value this as important. Instead, we see a trend within Christian families on focusing strictly on protecting itself from the bad influences of society. All of our battles are being fought to protect the "rights" of the family. It has come to the point, as we see it, that we call it "FAMILY-worship" (in contrast with "GOD-worship").

In an article in a Christian magazine, the author writes of the commitments of men who are involved in a growing movement in America. These commitments are to pray, study God's word, love their families - and then keep their promises. Some of you may see this as totally unreasonable and nit-picky but we feel that this commitment, to love your families, has gone too far. Don't get us wrong, we love our little family and want it to grow. But to raise our family is **not** our main goal in life, *nor should it be, for any God-fearing follower of Christ*.

Jesus said that the two greatest commandments are to, "Love *the Lord your God* with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and, "Love *your neighbor* as yourself" (Mt. 22:37, 39) This is the greatest thing you can do for your family: **focus on the Lord, your God**, not on your family. Instead of putting all your energy into bettering your family and its *rights*, seek to obey the commands of God, for God says, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Mt. 10:39). By focusing on those in our family, we will surely lose them. Instead, "*Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*" (Mt. 6:33).

What is reality?

What seems to be missing most in the American church is a healthy view of **reality**. We are pursuing things such as "that perfect house." (Begin with a "starter" and then work for that dream house.) We pursue a "perfect" body, or at least as close as we can get! A lot of time, money and energy is put into these each day and week. But isn't it interesting that two of the things God has promised His followers in Heaven are a beautiful mansion or dwelling place and a new body!?! Why then do we put so much stock in the ones we presently have? *Because we believe this world and what we can see to be more important than eternity.*

We seem to ignore the only two things we *cannot* do in eternity: **share the Gospel and suffer for Jesus**.

We see missions and evangelism as an option, one of many little clubs that we find little interest in. WE make choices such as family pets, spending money each month for its upkeep. One can adopt a national missionary in India for \$30 a month, less than some pay for their pets expenses. Should we not at least match our support to world evangelism to the amount we spend on our pets? This is just one example of beginning to live in light of eternity.

It seems to us that we, like the Corinthians, think that *this* is the Kingdom of God, and that we rule *now* as kings. Yet Paul points out that as apostles (who may be seen as leaders) they were put on display as wretched and defeated foes, "condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men!" (1 Cor. 4:9b, but look up verses 8-10). In other words, **our time to rule like kings has not come**. We are servants of the King of kings. That means we are to do His will - to sacrifice ourselves daily, and to suffer persecution and shame in our body, in order to, as Paul said, "fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions..." (Col. 1:24b)

To what extent does eternity affect our daily lives? In meeting family, friends and strangers, are we impressed with their spiritual state? What weight does it bear in our minds and hearts? If Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life wouldn't it be a terrible **injustice** to not try and explain to all who will listen, even if it means bringing it into conversations out of the blue? Beyond that, what of the millions that God has created, who are without a witness near them? What greater eternally-significant step could you take, than to give yourself for the sake of explaining the Gospel to unreached people?

Can we say as the writer of Hebrews, "And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. **For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come**"? (Heb. 13:12-14) To quote one of our favorite authors, Richard Wurmbrand, "*Let us leave little amusements for exceedingly great triumphs!*"

These are the attitudes we see. As fellow human-beings, and brother and sister in Christ, we admit our frailty and weakness. We struggle with making decisions that aren't eternally-minded. There are times when we haven't spoken boldly to people about Christ when we could have. We have at times put our own personal interests and those of our family above those of God. Yet, we strive to lift up Christ, follow His commands and obey Him.

We hope that these insights are weighed and considered by you. We also want to thank many of you who have inspired us and are seeking the "city that is to come" while living here in America. May God bless you with all his heavenly blessings.