

A Burden for Souls ~ the late Herbert S. Ebersole

Editor's note: *This article is reprinted from the September 1995 issue of The Pilgrim Witness.*

Where is everybody going? This seems a timely question in these days of increased running. Everybody is hurrying somewhere. The surge of headlights approaching and the stream of taillights leaving a traffic light remind us of Daniel 12:4b, "*Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.*" We are also reminded of Matthew 7:13, where Jesus tells us of the two ways and the need to enter the strait gate because the broad way leads to destruction.

In verse 14 of Matthew 7, Jesus also indicates that there are many needing help to find the road that leads to life. In Daniel 12:34 and in Matthew 25:23, we read that those who are engaged in helping people to become righteous shall receive eternal rewards. Brother, sister, do we believe God enough to deny self now to inherit rewards in eternity? Besides that, God has given to us the "word of reconciliation," which gives us responsibility as watchmen to give warnings, which if not given, others' blood would be required of us (Ezek 33:7-16; 2Cor 5:18-20).

The idea that God is a God of love and is so good that eventually everyone will get to heaven, is not Bible-based but rather wishful thinking. Unfortunately, many continue thinking that it is God's move. Satan is a liar, a deceiver, and has many tricks to keep Christians occupied with earthly things so they are not busy in kingdom work. He would even trick us into not taking time to read the Word of God each day. Of course he does not wish for anyone to go to heaven or be saved.

In 2Corinthians 5:9-19 the Apostle Paul gives several motives for witnessing to the unsaved. Some of them are as follows:

1. That we may be accepted of God (v9).
2. We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (v10).
3. Knowing the terror of the Lord (v11).
4. The love of Christ constraineth us (v14).
5. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature (v17).
6. The word of reconciliation is given unto us (vv18-19).

When we read this chapter and more of Paul's writings, we soon come to see that he believed that the salvation of the souls of men was very important. He suited actions to his belief so that his report in 2Corinthians 11:23-30 is that he went beyond any other in working and suffering for Christ. He recounted that he was beaten five times with thirty-nine stripes and three times with rods, once he was stoned, and three times he was shipwrecked. He endured perils of waters, of robbers, of his own countrymen, by the heathen, in the city, in the sea, and among false brethren. When Paul was speaking before King Agrippa and Festus, Festus seeing Paul's zeal, thought that Paul had become crazy. Paul told the Romans that he could wish himself accursed from Christ for his brethren's sake (Rom 9:3).

A look at Jesus Christ reveals a burden worthy for us to seek for ourselves. Jesus told the early disciples to come after Him and He would make them fishers of men. His schedule reveals His burden as He patiently preached and healed day after day. Wearied again and again from His activities, yet seeing the multitudes, He was moved with compassion and helped everyone. John 9:4 reveals why he had the burden and the unceasing activity—the night was coming when no man could work. Several times the record reveals Jesus being moved to tears, being grieved because of their hardness of heart, and sorrowing because of their unbelief. Again He went on to another village because He wished for all men to know, believe, and be saved.

Jesus stayed close to the Father through prayer, *“rising a great while before day,”* also spending whole nights in prayer. This kind of relationship gave Him a constant desire to please the Father. Romans 15:4 says even Christ pleased not Himself. Jesus spent His strength for the welfare of others.

Think of the time He stayed at Jacob’s well while the disciples went into the city to buy food. When they came back with food and told Him to eat, His reply was that He had meat to eat that they knew not of. The woman left her waterpot, went back to the city, and told others about her conversation, urging them to come see a man she believed to be the Messiah. Jesus told His disciples at that time that the harvest is ripe, all ready to be harvested, although grain harvest was yet four months away.

The depth of the love of Christ comes to us also in John 3:16, where we are told, *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son.”*

As we think of Moses, Jeremiah, Amos, Daniel, Paul, and others who lived lives with a burden for men, we confess a great need in our lives for the burden of the souls of men, and ask again to be filled with the love of God that constrains us to be a testimony every day.

One of our problems today is how to keep alive the burden when people do not wish to be bothered. Some are too busy seeking material security to listen; others are seeking pleasures and sports; still others are caught in the binding grip of drugs, remarriage, etc. Too many are being told by religious teachers they can live a double life, believing in Jesus while living in disobedience. Let us see all of this as a call to prayer and consecration to our Lord for His love to us. Constantly we need to encourage one another—*“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not”* (Gal 6:9). Let us sit at the feet of Jesus.

Read the prophets and feel the pulse of Jeremiah as he said, *“His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay”* (Jer 20:9).

The burden needs to be exercised, and when it is, it will give us an incentive to further exercise because there is joy in doing God’s kingdom work.

Since our talents vary and God needs and places different members of the body here and there, we ought to work with the body in visitation, in giving out tracts, and in personal witnessing as the Lord leads, for the welfare of the souls of men and for the glory of God.