

## **The Wanderers**

(12/31/03)

Greetings to the Church That Used to Meet at Betsy's House,

This is the second letter that I am writing this week. I will send the other one next time.

Many years ago I was part of a gang that we formed from among the group I ran with. In retrospect I find it interesting that of all the names we could have chosen we chose the "Wanderers". As I recall I was the one who came up with it.

In Genesis 4:12 when God cursed Cain for murdering his brother part of that pronouncement reads, "You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

My life manifested that same restless spirit. It was a life that was pretty much consumed with "looking" for something that I could not even define. I was always on the move, looking, wandering.

At age 28 I found, or rather was found by, my Friend and Savior, and began to grow in grace. The pastor who lead me to believe was also instrumental in getting me into Grace Bible College to prepare for service as a pastor. He, himself, was a graduate of Moody and understood and appreciated the uniqueness of the Pauline revelations. Eventually he even served as the dean of Grace Bible College and his son now carries on since his retirement.

I was certain that God had called me to the pastorate so I was ready to go. We packed up our old Chevy, loaded up a U-Haul, and left Spokane heading for Grand Rapids, Michigan.

There I was, a guy fresh out of the fire, in the midst of a foreign land. I was positive that an education was beneficial for the work of the pastorate so I was committed to doing the five years it required. In retrospect, however, I can see some pitfalls that have plagued me for decades. It is to those pitfalls that I want to direct the rest of this letter. It is my hope and prayer that they will be of some benefit to you in your walk, not wandering, with our Lord.

As I stated, I felt as if I were in a foreign land and not just because this was "Hollander" country. I was there in the midst of young men and women, most of whom were not married, who had come out of a background far different than mine. Most had come from homes that, if they weren't steeped in Biblical teaching, had a more than usual understanding of the Word. In addition to that they were pretty much white, middle-class, "straight arrow" types. At the very least, they had a fair degree of Biblical literacy and the college marked a conclusive place in their lives as they prepared for adulthood and ministry.

The professors there taught from that perspective since it was the most pervasive one.

In other words I didn't seem to fit in. That didn't bother me since I was there to "prepare" for the pastorate and besides I always felt like an outsider anyway. The irony is that while I didn't let it consciously bother me it did affect me.

In many classes the discussions centered around this thing called "dispensations". The other students seemed to accept it as something that was important and were able to dialogue with the professors, and visiting preachers, quite easily.

Within a fairly short period of time I, also, was able to converse about the "Word rightly divided" with the best of them. Often the conversations seemed to "heat up" with topics that related to the "mystery" revealed to the Apostle Paul. As I listened I could understand but they, the arguments, seemed to be much ado about what I considered minor points. There were, at least to my mind, many more important things to discussed. This whole dispensational thing was okay but not very practical. It was a matter for theologians and didn't impact the believer of today whose life was much more concerned with the struggles of everyday life. I determined within myself that once I got my own church I would not make such a "big deal" out these fine points of theology. Helping people with their everyday lives was a much more worthy and important task. Teaching them about the various dispensations of God in His Word was nice to know but certainly not important, let alone essential, to living the life He had called us to and provided us with.

True to my word I did not make teaching the Word, "rightly divided", a primary part of what I presented to those in the pew. I tried to make my preaching more practical, applicable, meaningful to what we are faced with everyday. I was fond of counseling and helping people deal with the troublesome circumstances that come about as we walk through this fallen world.

It wasn't very long though before I began to sense a loss of motivation in my own life. I began to question whether or not I should even be in the pastorate. As I stood at the pulpit on Sunday morning and looked out over the group gathered there I can remember asking myself, "why are they even here?" The inner dialogue continued with, "if I didn't have to be here on Sunday I wouldn't be".

Can you imagine!!! The preacher didn't even have a compelling reason for being there.

Well, it wasn't long before I found a way out. As usual my "way out" was a way that I had "unconsciously" brought about myself. It was a way that allowed me to distance myself from a clear-cut personal confrontation with the whole belief of a "calling" etc. I didn't want to open that whole can of worms and see if any of what I believed was true really was true because I feared what I might find. I might find, upon closer examination, that maybe even my salvation was not as sure as I once thought. It was something better left alone.

In any case, I engineered a way out that would "force" me out of the pastorate without having to examine what I thought was true at one time. Not only did I leave the pastorate but I left all vestiges of that life as well. I abandoned my wife and children. I cut off all ties to that life yet still believed I was "saved".

I went out into the world and would seek meaning there. I would find another way to live out this existence here on planet earth. I once again became a full-time "wanderer".

Eventually, thank God, my wife, children and I were reconciled and have been together ever since. That was over 25 years ago.

For over 20 years, however, I had no real fellowship or contact with any local body of believers. I still clung to the fact that I was going to Heaven and that all my sins had been forgiven. But my life was still the life of a "wanderer".

Several years ago a few believers in the area had contacted a organization, the Berean Bible Society, in search of someone who might teach them. They were looking for someone who was "dispensational" and somehow my name came up. (Just a pure coincidence I'm sure) They got in touch with me and we arranged to meet and discuss the possibility of starting a Bible study.

At the first meeting I told them that I would be glad to teach but don't expect me to be strong on any of that old dispensational stuff. (The old seed was still firmly implanted in my thinking) They agreed, they must have been desperate, and we began meeting every other week.

As I prepared for the studies I began, once again, to grow in His Word. It wasn't long before I was reading some books by some "hard-core" dispensational teachers. Not only was I reading them but I was considering what they said. As the Spirit led me along I even began to consider that understanding the plan of God might be more than just some "theological fine points"!!! Go figure!!!

Now, several years later, I have learned the critical importance of understanding God's Word, rightly divided. Let me see if I can share with you, as succinctly as possible, why it is vital to living the life we now have in and through Christ.

All of us as human beings are primarily concerned about ourselves and our immediate loved ones. Our lives are spent, generally speaking, trying to provide a manner of living that is "good" for them and us. That involves "looking" for those ways that will do just that. We are "searching" for something that will meet our personal requirements and in the process, we hope, give us a sense of satisfaction. When that satisfaction doesn't materialize we "search" for other ways or things to fill that "satisfaction" void. The evidence of our longing is in the searching. We don't search for more when we are satisfied.

The world is all too happy to provide all kinds of "rabbit trails" to follow. They all hold out the promise of satisfaction. They are manifest in things like having a great vocation, money, position, a wonderful family, helping others and on and on and on. While those things, in and of themselves, in many instances may be okay they still do not satisfy. So the searching continues. In the end they are found empty and the "restless" meandering continues.

It is only when we come to the end of ourselves and our plan that will we consider what is God's plan. It is there we will find the satisfaction we have been longing and looking for. The operative words here are "God's plan".

Without a proper understanding of God's Word we will never understand God's plan. We may get bits and pieces here and there but never have a clear, coherent and compelling picture of what He has done

and is doing today. Without that clarity we will never have the focus and the power it brings. We will, even as believers, be wanderers on the face of this earth.

Once we clearly see God's plan we find the direction and understanding that is the prerequisite to living "the" life, a life of meaning and purpose. A life of power and satisfaction. Only then will we see where we "fit". In order to see that we must understand the Bible from a dispensational point of view. It is not merely theological fine points but rather the foundation of the great life God has for you.

Let me end with this---"Is your life a aimless wandering? Do you wonder why you are here? Do you find yourself going from one thing to another looking for satisfaction? Or maybe you have just given up and are simply trying to make it through. In your darker moments do you just want to give up--or--are you holding out for that 'one' thing that the world offers that will finally meet your deepest need? Maybe you are even finding 'ways' to deaden the pain of living"

Well, for you there is an answer and like most answers from God it doesn't seem to fit at first. We spend most of our lives trying to fill that hole with what we think, i.e. have been programmed to believe, will fill it. How's it working for you?

Don't waste the years I have following those "rabbit trails" rather come and learn about God and His plan. As you do that you will begin to learn about the greatest plan of all. As you participate in His plan you will find yourself and the satisfaction you have been yearning for.

We will be meeting this Friday at 7:30 PM at Ukrops. Please get yourself a cup coffee or a drink or snack up front before you come back. See you then.

In His Love,

Tomme