Part 1

Faith Alive Through--

LEARNING TO DIE

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Dying by letting go of self is the first lesson to an ALIVE FAITH! It is a primary lesson that opens the door to every other grace.

I learned this lesson on a physical plane when only 10 years old. The teachers were my older brother, Oren, and the quicksand of Mule Creek. We lived within one-half block of this creek and often spent the long hot summer afternoons swimming, fishing and exploring its sandy holes. On this particular day in late Spring, just after the creek had flooded, we found a patch of quicksand. Running through it we would sink in up to our ankles or knees and slosh out the other side. It felt good on our bare feet. Next time, I decided to walk through and quickly it sucked me down to my waist. No amount of self effort could get me back on top or over to the edge. The more I tried to get up and out, the deeper I sank. Oren hollered to me these strange words: "Lie down flat!" In my fear that was the last thing I wanted to do. I struggled! Even now the fear of that moment causes my skin to tighten and goose bumps to appear. My fear told me that I would probably be buried alive. Into my mind popped an incident about a young cousin that had lost his life trying to rescue a watermelon out of a flooding creek, "LIE DOWN! LIE DOWN FLAT ON YOUR BACK!" came my brother's voice, now filled with some apprehension. I was losing the battle myself, so with no understanding as to WHY, I followed his strange advice. And, suddenly I was winning! The guicksand would not act rapidly on a large flat surface like my back. The next moment I was looking up at the bright afternoon sun as it filtered through the swaying limbs of the cottonwood trees that lined the creek bank. Tears ran down my cheeks as I caught my breath. Now, he was saying, "Start rolling over from side to side." Strange words again, but he had been right once, so I obeyed. I rolled over from side to side out of the quicksand and stood on solid ground. Glad I was to be safe from the sinking quicksand!

Now, many years later, the Lord was teaching me the same lesson on a Higher Plane. He bid me to die to self and lean on Him!

The Lord called my attention to a simple three-fold recipe that tells HOW TO DO IT. It is recorded in Philippians 2.

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a <u>servant</u>, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became <u>obedient</u> to the point of death, even the death of the cross." (1)**

This Divine recipe for effecting the mind of Christ in us is accomplished by the action of the words underlined in the above Scripture.

LESSON #1 - Let GO OF Self

To let go of self is to learn to die. No, not the kind of death when our heart ceases to beat, but the kind that Paul was thinking of when he said "I die daily."

One translator records Philippians 2:6,7 like this, (Jesus) "did not consider it necessary to hang on. He was willing to <u>let go</u>."

God has two plans to assist us in dying to SELF.

#1--We can voluntarily let go of self by facing the events of life with a humble attitude.

#2 If we demonstrate an unyielding spirit, God will humble us by *allowing* certain obstacles and trials in our living.

In plan #1 the c-h-o-i-c-e- is <u>ours</u> as suggested by the first word in Philippians 2:5 - "<u>LET</u>"-Meaning that permission must be granted. We can voluntarily LET GO of SELF by exercising our will to choose. James says it this way "Humble yourself in the sight of God, and He will lift you up." (4:10)

We must watch ourselves very closely in this every day

^{**}Hereafter, in this book all special markings in Scripture Verses are mine and used for emphasis. (italicized, underlined, or capitalized).

business of living. Most matters that concern ourselves and others reveal where we place SELF. When self is on the throne, all kinds of inner turmoil and outer conflict result. Conversely, when Christ is on the throne, we experience inner joy and outer peace.

Words from an old fisherman -- he had probably forgotten more about fishing than most of us will ever know about it --speak to this matter of dying to SELF.

(Jesus) said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch. Simon answered and said to Him, Master we have toiled all the night and taken nothing; nevertheless at your word I will let down the net." (2)

SELF bowed to the Savior and the next scene is a net so full of fish that it begins to break.

Jesus was faced with invitations to yield to SELF interests. First, the tempter said "Turn the stones to bread" (yield to hunger). Second, he invited Jesus to jump from a pinnacle of the Temple (tempt God by abuse of power). Third, the challenge to exalt SELF: "All these things I will give you if you will fall down and worship me." (Matthew 4:1-11) So, the Lord was tempted to worship a lesser god--self. SELF is one of satan's great disguises. So, we recognize the built-in dangers of SELFishness, SELF-assertion, SELF-exaltation, or SELF-sufficiency.

Just as Jesus waged a battle with SELF, each of us also engages the enemy on the same battleground. I remind myself constantly that SELF is a wall as high as the Great Wall of China. It was the original battleground in the Garden of Eden. Satan tempted Eve and Adam in the same three areas as Jesus was tempted--to elevate SELF thru PRIDE. They lost! He won! We wage the battle!

A vivid lesson for me in LETTING GO OF SELF arose when the Church in Drumright, Oklahoma invited us to consider being their located preacher.

Seeking the Will of the Lord, I chose to use our August Daily Vacation Bible School as a guidance factor. I

prayed--"Lord, if you will us to stay at Minneola, then let the D.V.B.S. this year be more successful than last year."

True to FLESHLY SELF I chose the enrollment, attendance and mission offering figures as guidance factors. I noted the first three days that everything was running just a little less. Total previous enrollment of 100 was down 10, average daily attendance down 2 and mission offering was off \$1 per day from the previous year. Some kind of a direction signal was developing?

In my Wednesday meditation time, the Lord reminded me that "even the devil can influence numbers." A quick survey in my mind reminded me that three of our faithful families were on vacation this second week in August which could easily account for the lessened numbers over a year ago.

However, the Lord chose His own time and way to tell me what HE considered to be "A MORE SUCCESSFUL DAILY VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL."

Friday came and the final closing assembly. The usual reports were read, announcements made about the picnic and closing program. As we sang the usual closing chorus, kids started moving. Now, among 90 kids, there is always movement and noise; but, these kids were moving out into the aisles. I stepped over to our Summer Youth Minister, Dan Cravatt, and said--"What are these kids doing? Dan said--"I don't know. Let's ask and find out." Keep in mind that NO IN-VITATION was being offered or had even been mentioned. Yet, 14 kids lined up across the front. The end result was 7 baptisms, 1 transfer and 6 re-dedications. Never before or since in dozens of Vacation Bible Schools have I seen anything like this. I have seen results a-f-t-e-r a school is ended from the seed sown but never during the school.GOD WAS SPEAKING! This was HIS ANSWER as to a more successful DVBS than the previous year! True, God used numbers but the kind, as we sometimes say, that the devil wouldn't touch with a ten foot pole.

In letting SELF die I heard and saw the answer loud and

clear! We stayed on at Minneola and the best was yet to be in those later years.

PLAN #2:

God has another plan when we are unwilling to let go of SELF. He allows events in our life to puncture our ego, to deflate SELF. He uses various instruments to accomplish this. With Jonah it was a fish. The still small voice spoke to Elijah while a mysterious hand writing on a wall deflated Nebuchadnezzar. Peter was humbled by a crowing rooster. Jesus said to Saul "It is hard for you to kick against the pricks." The goad that was Saul's undoing was the stoning of Stephen followed by the bright light and voice on the Damascus Road and then three days of blindness. (Acts 8:58-9:6)

One by one the Lord removed my artificial crutches of trusting in SELF.

- ***SELF-assertion was struck a hard blow when the Army refused me as a Chaplain due to faulty hearing in one ear.
- ***SELF-exaltation shook when an aptitude test in the Graduate School of Butler University indicated I should be an undertaker, not a preacher.
- ***My SELF-sufficiency was shattered with the final diagnosis of our youngest daughter's problem. Through many months of medical appointments and examinations, our confidence that man can solve all problems jumped up and down like a recording needle on a wind instrument in a hurricane. Each medical specialist and psychologist brought new but false hopes.

The conclusion was that Lisa had a severe emotional handicap. We were advised to place her at the age of six in a State Institution.

***Our firstborn son's strange car accident and death was a blow to our SELF-satisfaction. We were

proud of his graduation from high school with honors and enrollment in Bible College. Lynn was eager to do God's Will!

God deflated my SELF by taking away some prized possessions named above. The poet expresses it well when he said:

One by one He took them from me, All the things I valued most; Until I was empty handed, Every glittering toy was lost

And at last I understood,
With my mind so slow and dull
That God could not pour His riches
Into hands already full.(3)

Our walk with Jesus must be punctuated with many deaths of self. My study of God's men and women of the past and present reveal the above truism. Beautiful is such a story of a friend of mine, Bro. Carl Ketcherside. Leroy Garrett tells it this way in his book.

The turning point in Ketcherside's ministry came while he was a missionary to Ireland, where he was exposed to a larger fellowship of believers. Finding that the sectarianism he had brought with him from America was not the answer, he was tossed upon a sea of despair and uncertainity. He found his answer on a wintry night in a little frame Church of Christ in Belfast. Alone and cold, he set his mind upon the promise of Revelation 3:20, and while he had been a preacher for three decades and had baptized thousands and was a "bishop," he did what he had never done before: he invited Jesus into his heart. (4)

Therefore, if we would have the mind of Christ, let us do as he said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him <u>deny himSELF</u>, take up his cross daily and follow me." Luke 9:23.

LESSON #2 - Become a Servant

The next two Divine lessons in Paul's recipe are both <u>causes</u> and <u>effects</u>. Some may say, "How do I know if I have let go of self?" We can t-e-s-t ourselves with these examination questions---How many rights do I have? Do I have a servant's attitude? Of Jesus, Paul says in Philippians 2:7. (He) "emptied himself by taking the form of a servant."

First, we die to SELF and become a SERVANT by doing as Jesus did, (He) "emptied himself..." (Philippians 2:7). How can we t-e-s-t ourselves as to being empty or full of SELF?

"How empty am I of SELF?" is a question that forever arises in our walk. My good friend, Ruth McKinley of Muskogee, Oklahoma, shared with me some meaningful words in a tract by an unknown author that tests our SELF-LIFE.

The following are some features and manifestations of the self-life. The Holy Spirit alone can interpret and apply this to each individual life. As you read, examine yourself in the very presence of God.

Are you ever conscious of:*

*A secret spirit of pride - an exalted feeling, in view of your success or position; because of your good training or appearance; because of your natural gifts and abilities? An important, independent spirit?

*Love of human praise; a secret fondness to be noticed; love of supremacy, drawing attention to self in conversation; a swelling out of self when you have had a free time in speaking or praying?

*The stirrings of anger or impatience, which, worst of all, you call nervousness or holy indignation; a touchy, sensitive spirit; a disposition to resent and retaliate when disapproved of or contradicted; a desire to throw sharp, heated words at another?

*Self-will; a stubborn, unteachable spirit; an arguing, talkative spirit; harsh, sarcastic expressions; a driving commanding spirit; a disposition to criticize and pick flaws when set aside and unnoticed; a pevish, fretful spirit; a disposition that loves to be coaxed and humored?

*Carnal fear; a man-fearing spirit; a shrinking from reproach and duty; reasoning around your cross; a shrinking from doing your whole duty by those of wealth or position; a fearfulness that someone will offend and drive some prominent people away; a compromising spirit?

*A jealous disposition, a secret spirit of envy shut up in your heart; an unpleasant sensation in view of the great prosperity and success of another; a disposition to speak of the faults and failings, rather than the gifts and virtues of those more talented and appreciated than yourself?

*A dishonest, deceitful disposition; the evading and covering of the truth; the covering up of your real faults; leaving a better impression of yourself than is strictly true; false humility; exaggeration; straining the truth?

*Unbelief, a spirit of discouragement in times of pressure and opposition; lack of quietness and confidence in God, lack of faith and trust in God; a disposition to worry and complain in the midst of pain, poverty, or at the dispensations of Divine Providence; an overanxious feeling whether everything will come out right?

*Formality and deadness; lack of concern for lost souls; dryness and indifference; lack of power with God?

*Selfishness; love of ease; love of money? (5)

The above are some of the traits which indicate self rules in part or whole. I search my heart with this prayer:

Search me, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me' (Psams 139:23,24) "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me (Psalm 51:10).

Second, we become a SERVANT by developing a servant's attitude.

Supper was over. The disciples of Jesus were playing the waiting game according to John 13:1 and following. No one wanted to be the servant. Thoughts like these must have traversed their minds.

Who is going to take his robe off? Who is going to gird himself with a towel? Who is going to get a basin? Who is going to fill the basin with water? Who is going to kneel in front of each one?
Who is going to wash the dirty feet?
He needn't think I'm going to do it!
I wouldn't wash his feet ever!
Another looks across the room: if he hadn't said what he did about me, I might have.

Another reasons: why should I wash his feet?

I'm far superior intellectually to him!

JESUS GETS UP...Removes His robe...Girds himself with a towel...Fills a Basin and approaches Peter...Kneels and takes hold of Peter's feet.

Peter says, "What do you think you're going to do"?

"I'm going to wash your feet, Peter."

"No, you're NOT!"

"Then, you're no part of me, Peter."

"OH, THEN WASH ME ALL OVER!"

If we have been washed in the Blood of the Lamb, then plunge in today, deny self and seek to be a servant!

More often than not, we are called "slaves-servants" in the New Testament. Dulos is the Greek word for both. We have NO RIGHTS! This doesn't set well in a "free" age. We hear so much about Civil Rights, the right to demonstrate and march, the right to sue our fellow men in a court of law. Yet, I affirm the only possible right we have is to die and go to hell. You see, we earned that right because we "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;" "The wages of sin is death." (Romans 3:23; 6:23)

Dangerous are our SELF-assertions! As a young "pharisee," I had made many "I WON'T" statements. Among them was this declaration: "I WILL NEVER WASH FEET AS A RELIGIOUS ACT!"

The test of this assertion came at a week of Senior Youth Camp near Glencoe, Oklahoma. O.S.U. Campus Minister, John Lacey, was the dean of the week. I was serving as Evangelist and teaching a course on "Dealing With The Devil." On Wednesday evening all of us at camp met around a blazing campfire to dedicate ourselves to God. Strange things

began happening the next morning. A spirit of bitterness swept thru the camp. The campers complained about the food. The cooks heard and became bitter. The bad spirit was contagious as faculty members began to grumble and complain.

Evening came, and a somber spirit with nobody talking prevailed. Supper was eaten in almost complete silence and the evening service lacked the Presence of the Lord.

As the sun was setting the Dean summoned us back to the ashes of last night's campfire. We sat in a circle. Very deliberately, without a word, he laid the wood in place for the new fire. No one was talking or looking around. Young servant. John Lacey, took a pan of water and a towel and began to wash the feet of faculty and campers. He told us he had sinned. That we had sinned. But, God loved us and he did too. Muffled sobs filled the air. He washed my feet. I allowed the act as it was being done to me, not by me. The moonlight and the light of this act cast long shadows across all our hearts. Campers often do strange things. At this point, they began to chant in whispers-"Who will wash the Dean's feet? Who will wash John's feet?" I shivered in the cool breeze. No one moved. Still they chanted. I got up, picked up the pan and the towel. My tears mingled with the water as I washed the feet of servant John and told him about Jesus' love and mine, too. John lit the fire. It flamed up high as if angels were fanning the blaze. He passed the Lord's Supper. The service was done; but, the spirit of the Servant had just begun!

Just as Jesus stepped from Deity into humanity thru the door of humility, even so, if we are to step from humanity into eternity, it must be thru that same door of humility.

LESSON #3 - Learning to Obey

This lesson is also a <u>test</u> and a <u>tool</u> in letting go of self. The test question is: "How willing am I to obey?"

We take the third step in realizing this "mind of Christ" that Paul speaks about by doing what Jesus did.

"And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."(6)

In our call to obey, PRAISE GOD, we will never be called on to face what Jesus faced. Death, hell, and all the sin of the ages was the enemy He met on the battleground of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. Obedient He was and victorious forever!

The importance of obeying truth had been instilled in me at an early age. After moving to Cherryvale, Kansas in 1947, I began to attend the church I had joined at Medicine Lodge out of the Union Chapel Revival. In the Fall of that year, we were invited to attend a Revival Meeting at the Christian Church. The Evangelist, Bob J. Cox, preached on the subject "What The Bible Teaches About Baptism." As we left the service that night, my Mother said to Preacher Cox at the door, "You are mistaken about baptism. We have not been immersed but we have been baptized and we always follow the truth of the Bible." Bob Cox responded by saying-"Mrs. Johnson, if you have the time, I can come by your house tomorrow and we can discuss this matter from our Bibles." So an appointment with Divine Destiny was made for us. The meeting was arranged for after school so my sisters, Patsy and Janet, and myself could be there.

Let me say kindly that my Mother, Tempest Johnson, lives up to her name which means tempestuous. Her 4 foot 6 inch physical stature is compensated for by drive and determination. Being a school teacher in earlier years, she did her homework well. We had Bibles and were prepared to use them. Further preparation included calling our local preacher and asking for appropriate Bible verses to establish truth. I have forever appreciated this good man's honesty when he said, "Mrs. Johnson, don't get all excited about this subject. It is not that important and there are no Bible verses I can give you that will prove sprinkling is baptism." We were defenseless and could do little else at the appointed hour than look up one verse after another which revealed a facet of truth.

Now, came the MOMENT OF TRUTH. Would we do what my Mother had asserted?--"we always follow the truth." We did! One by one we took this new step of following Jesus.

OBEYING TRUTH now came to be a banner flying high from the flagpole of my life! Yet, I limited this obedience to a few central truths for some twenty years. Wearing the right name, communion every Sunday, tithing, baptism and proper church government were the truths that I held high in practice and preaching!

After twenty years of little growth I was privileged to begin learning OBEDIENCE in the company of others desiring a closer walk with the Lord. Bob Osburn, fellow preacher, was one of these. I first met Bob when he was preaching at Syracuse, Kansas and we labored together in the Ashland (Kansas) Christian Youth Camp. Both of us were concerned about OBEYING TRUTH that we had shut ourselves away from for many years. So, when one of the campers was overtaken by some kind of fit and critical abdominal pains, we asked ourselves--doesn't the Bible say to "Pray for the sick? Ask and you will receive?" Knowing that it did, we laid hands on this high school senior at two o'clock in the morning and prayed. Bob was as surprised and elated, as was I, when the fit and the pain ceased. The young man was so much amazed at the power of God in response to OBEDIENCE, that he accepted Jesus as his personal Saviour!

God uses many tools to teach us OBEDIENCE. One of these is suffering. It is written of Jesus, "Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered." (Hebrews 5:8)

Some of God's servants today are called to learn OBEDIENCE by suffering. Included in this band of pilgrims was my good friend, Bro. Osburn.

After the above camp incident, the years went by and Jesus presented Bob with many challenging lessons. His response, time after time, was a beautiful YES.

So, when the medical news that he had inoperable cancer

of the pancreas and liver reached Bob during Christmas week in 1981, he responded with beautiful OBEDIENCE--The Lord is in charge! That suffering leads to obedience is well illustrated in Bob's life. At Bob's memorial service, Dr. Max Foster, leader of the Random Road Chapel in Arkansas City, Kansas where Bob ministered, told this story.

One of Bob's concerns was that he might not have shared enough suffering for Jesus' sake. We know that Paul in the Roman letter in chapter 8, verse 17, tells us that if we are to share His glory we must also share His suffering. It was only four or five nights ago that Bob and Rose were discussing this very thing in his hospital room.

There are different kinds of suffering and not all qualify as suffering for Christ, but those that witness for Christ do qualify. Some suffered the torture of the whip for speaking the Good News; others suffered the torture of disease and were yet holding the banner of Christ high. In both cases they were sharing Christ's suffering.

Rose read to Bob this passage from I Peter 4: 12 & 13. It reads like this:

"Dear friends, don't be bewildered or surprised when you go through the fiery trials ahead, for this is no strange, unusual thing that is going to happen to you. Instead, be really glad because these trials will make you partners with Christ in His suffering, and afterwards, you will have the wonderful joy of sharing His glory in that coming day when it will be displayed."

Rose asked Bob at this time if he didn't feel now as if he had suffered with Christ and he said yes he had. He felt this way. They both agreed that Bob and Christ were partners and both would share in His coming glory. Praise God!

OBEYING now became a new way of life for me. For twenty-five years after finding Jesus, I was too busy going to church, memorizing Scripture, tithing, judging others and attending Bible College to <u>OBEY</u>.

In my blind zeal to follow truth, I became a zealot seeking out parts of truth and judging others with the same. My horizons were much too limited. For my study of truth was limited to a few particular facets of truth--*Baptism, *Wearing the right name, *Communion every Sunday, *Tithing and

*Proper church government.

Was I dead to SELF? Did I have a SERVANT'S attitude? If so, OBEDIENCE would not be hard. And it wasn't! It was the unlearning of half-truths and well entrenched religious habits that was most difficult.

Worship was the first truth God called me to see and OBEY. To me, worship meant going to Church on Sunday to sing, pray, give, commune and listen.

While preaching through the book of Romans at the Minneola (Kansas) Christian Church, I came to the 12th chapter, verses 1 and 2 and in particular the phrase "reasonable service." I almost doubted God when he opened my eyes through a search of His Word to see that worship always had been and still is the "Presenting of our bodies as living sacrifices" (Romans 12:1). The "bridling of our tongue,..visiting the orphans and widows,..and keeping myself unspotted from the world" from James 1:26,27 is also worship. This was contrary to everything I had ever called or heard of anyone in America calling worship. I was threatened by such thoughts because of my many years of "Dr. Jekyll -Mr. Hyde" style of religion--Doing the proper religious acts on Sunday but living the SELF life Monday thru Saturday.

The Lord revealed to me out of a long study, which has now become a teaching seminar, that there are seven Greek words in the New Testament all translated "worship" in the King James Bible. "Reasonable service" of Romans 12:1 is one of these as is "religion" in James 1:26-27. None of these seven words are ever associated with the church or Sunday activities. The church met together for at least ten reasons, but worship was not among them.

I was encouraged to learn that others before my time had realized these same truths about worship. Some of them include devoted Bible students Carl Ketcherside, R.M. Bell, J.W. McGarvey, Victor E. Hoven, Henry E. Hill and Burton Thurston in "The Christian Standard" weekly publication plus M.R. DeHann of "The Radio Bible Class" had realized

these same truths about worship. Sadly, precious few had ever given this truth any practical OBEDIENCE.

William Barclay in his "Daily Bible Study Series" says it best with these words--

"So, Paul says, 'take your body; take all the tasks that you have to do every day; take the ordinary work of the shop, the factory, the shipyard, the mine; and offer all that as an act of worship to God.' Now here we have a most significant thing—the true worship, the really spiritual worship, is the offering of one's body and all that one does every day with it, to God."(7)

As I learned a new truth and followed it the LORD REVEALED HIMSELF to me more and more. Just as He had promised in John 14:21:

"He that has my commandments and keeps them, loves me; and he that loves me is loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him."

Weymouth translates this last phrase to say--"Reveal myself to him".

There is great power in obedience. My return from the "far country" of serving self and sin is measured best by TRUTHS REALIZED! Thus, in the years that followed, He led me in learning to be filled with His Spirit, living by faith, praising Him in all things, dealing with the devil, fasting and praying, hearing God as He speaks, following the Spirit's leading to win the lost, loving others by faith, enjoying the ministry of God's Angels, learning His 10 laws of healing plus the secret of why He doesn't always heal and the list gets longer--year by year. But, it all depends on my continued willingness to let the Mind of Christ be supreme by dying to self, possessing a servant's attitude and following through with OBEDIENCE to His Truth.

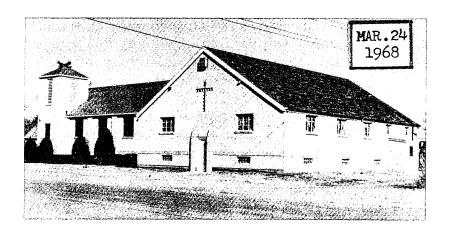
The common denominator of this self-death is:

ACCORDING TO OUR DYING TO SELF, SO SHALL OUR LIVING BE.

1971 was the year I learned to die to self and be serious about obedience to His revealed Truth! It was a very good year.

FAITH ALIVE IN HEART, HOME and CHURCH NOTES - Chapter 1

- 1. Philippians 2:5-7
- 2. Luke 5:4
- 3. Poem, "One by one He took them from me"
- 4. Book, "The Stone Campbell Movement" p. 668 by Leroy Garrett. Used by permission of College Press, Joplin, Missouri
- 5. Tract by an unknown author
- 6. Philippians 2:5
- 7. From "The Letter to the Romans" by William Barclay p. 169.



First Christian Church Minneola, Kansas