



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume XI
Issue 263

A "Not Many" Ministry

by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

For you see your calling, brothers, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called (I Corinthians 1:26).

Paul's was a "not many" ministry, and so it is with ours. The "not many" ministry is the ministry to which God has called us!



When we ask Paul, "How many ...?" Paul gives us the answer: "Not many!" So, the next time you are asked one of those "How many" questions, simply reply, "Not many!"

Instead of a "many" ministry, ours is a "foolish," "weak," "base," "despised" and "things that are not" – i.e., "nothing" – ministry!

For you see your calling, brothers, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world, and the things which are despised, has God chosen, yes, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him are you in Christ Jesus, Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord" (I Corinthians 1:26-31).

God is calling the *first-fruits* of Christ's redemp-

tive work. He is giving faith to the *first-trusters*. God's ultimate plan includes *all* of His creation; but He does not currently seek to reveal Himself, nor His plan to the masses. If it was His purpose, He would have accomplished it long ago. He has actually taken elaborate steps to assure that He and His plan are sufficiently hidden from the masses.

... You have **hidden** these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them to babes (Matthew 11:25).

*But they understood not this saying, and it was **hidden** from them, that they perceived it not ... (Luke 9:45).*

Instead, God chooses the "not many" whom He wills to receive His revelation *at this time*.

... All men cannot receive this saying, except they to whom it is given (Matthew 19:11).

God's initial plan upon the stage of human history is to reveal Himself to a few – "not many." He unveils Himself to the remnant, the called, the elect.

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Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

ISSN: 1936-9360

Volume XI, No. 263 – October 19, 2010

This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any "church," "denomination," "movement," "organization," "mission," "creed," "meeting," "school," "conference" or "fellowship."

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NOT MANY (continued from page 2445)

Do not be discouraged as you look around you. What you see is not the end of God's plan and purpose. Granted, "*the whole world lies in wickedness*" (I John 5:19), but God is not yet done. Don't judge the final outcome by the current state of things. This is not the finished product of God.

God will one day be "*All in all*," but in the meantime, let's not allow ourselves to be carried away with the Gentile obsession of numbering people. This is not the measure of success. Let's not fight the divine plan and viewpoint! Let's stop contending with God.

NUMBERING PEOPLE: A GENTILE OBSESSION

We have an inherent obsession with numbering people. We are impressed by it. It is a vexation of our spirit that carries over into our view of spiritual life. We assume that if it is of God, or for God, it must be large and involve many people.

Listen to what people say:

"How many believe what you believe?"

"How many do you have on Sunday?"

"How many were at the Conference?"

"How many are attending Bible study now?"

"How many are on your mailing list?"

"How many ...?" etc.

Just pay attention the next time you are with other Christians. You might be amazed at how *central* this concept is thought to be in our "spiritual" life.

However, God is not so obsessed and impressed. He is not bound or motivated by such a Gentile viewpoint of success.

Let's reflect on two biblical examples.

God's work in the ark resulted in the worldwide saving of eight souls. Count them – eight souls (I Peter 3:20; II Peter 2:5). This is not very impressive by Gentile standards (nor Christendom's, either!).

Then, the Book of Acts is sometimes viewed as a place where positive significance is given to "large" numbers:

Howbeit many of them who heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand (Acts 4:4).

This all sounds very impressive, doesn't it? Yet the numberings are really a part of the indictment *against* Israel. Think about it for a moment: God had been dealing with Israel (Abraham's physical descendants) for over two millennia. He had sent them a host of prophets; He had given them His Word; He had sent them His Son; and what was the national result? 5,000 men!

Only **5,000** men from an entire nation after over 2,000 years of work!? (Some estimates have the population of Jews at that time numbering some four million. If this is correct, then that would equate to just over 1% of the Jewish population that believed.) 5,000 would seem more like an *indictment* against this Nation. So maybe we need to adjust our Gentile thinking to match the context – maybe these numbers are not as impressive as they may first appear.

"NOT MANY" IS "TOO MANY" THE EXAMPLE OF GIDEON

God is fond of reducing numbers. It is His classic *modus operandi*.

Every now and then we have one of our readers inquire as to the size of our circulation. We assure them that the Lord has given us a "*not many*" ministry (I Corinthians 1:26-29); and God even reduces that from time to time. This is God's way. Let us note two examples from the Scriptures.

God's method is one of *reduction*. Gideon's 32,000 soldiers were too many for God to ►

use, so He “cleared the decks,” sending 31,700 back home, leaving only 300 to do His work.

9,700 men; leaving Gideon with a measly army of 300!

Israel was facing the Midianites in battle, who, with the Amalekites, were situated,

Mark it well – it is God’s method to *reduce* the army! In God’s book, “*not many*” is ultimately “*too many*.”

Along in the valley like grasshoppers for a multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for a multitude (Judges 7:12).

God chose to use Gideon and his army of 300 to defeat “*a multitude*”!

The enemy was said to be “*a multitude*,” and even their camels were “*without number, as the sand by the sea*.” I’d say Gideon had one small problem: he “*only*” had 32,000 men to fight against this massive enemy. God, however, had a different view. God thought that Gideon had *too many* in his army.

“NOT MANY” IS “TOO MANY” THE EXAMPLE OF OUR LORD

Men are obsessed with numbers, mergers and largeness. All throughout history, while men have been enamored with size and noise as their standards for greatness and success, God has been accomplishing His purpose in what would appear to be obscure, insignificant ways. This can be seen clearly in the earthly ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, for His was one that would be weeded down from multitudes to a solitary place on Golgotha’s tree.

*The people that are with you are **too many** for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me, saying, “My own hand has saved me” (Judges 7:2).*

Look at the many thousands who came to Him early in His ministry.

If we were Gideon, we would have seen our army of 32,000 facing this multitude whose camels could not even be counted and said, “We have way too few to win this battle!” We would have sought God to *increase* the ranks of so few!

They who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children (Matthew 14:21).

God’s solution? Reduction!

Five thousand men! This number did not include women and children. The Lord Jesus Christ had a great multitude following Him; but the Father would quickly rectify this situation. He would whittle them down – way down – and way fast. This was the divine plan; and it would happen in very short order! In fact, the feeding of the “five thousand” would be the actual turning point of “popularity” in His teaching ministry.

What? God says that we have “*too many*”?

“*TOO MANY*”!? Are you kidding me!?

God told Gideon that he had *too many* for Him to use. How strange is that? God’s ways are definitely not our ways!

Look at John’s account of the “*five thousand*” men in chapter 6, and then watch the situation quickly deteriorate – with the multitude leaving in mass exodus.

God took Gideon through a process to reduce the number of his army. He told Gideon to tell the people, “*Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart ...*” (:3). The result? Over two-thirds (22,000 men) departed; reducing Gideon’s army to 10,000 men. Yet God said that there were still “*too many*” (:4), so He gave them a test that resulted in the release of another

The account starts with this “*great multitude*” following Him (:2). He was so popular that they desired to “*take Him by force, to make Him a king*”

(:15). This was all about to change, though. They were soon to be *offended* with His teaching – as He would be their Stone of stumbling and Rock of offense. Even His Own disciples found His teaching “*hard*” to handle. “*His disciples, when they had heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can hear it?’*” (:60), to which He responded, “*No man can come to Me, except it were given to him of My Father*” (:65).

Not only was there a wholesale departure by the multitude, but “*from that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him*” (:66). Then Jesus asked the remaining Twelve, “*Will you also go away?*” (:67). Peter answered him, “*Lord, to whom shall we go?*” (:68) – but even Peter himself would go, before this ministry was all over.

So in the space of one chapter in the book of John we move from “*a great multitude*” all the way down to the Twelve, with the Lord informing them that even one of them was a demon (:70-71). That is an astonishing diminishing in short order!

However, the diminishing would not end. By the time we get to the end of their stay in the garden of Gethsemane, “*they all forsook Him, and fled*” (Mark 14:50). Peter would even go so far as to “*curse*” and “*swear*” that he did not even know Him (Matthew 26:74; Mark 14:71). Thus goes the ministry of our Lord. His greatest work would be done *alone*.

“NOT MANY” IS “TOO MANY” THE EXAMPLE OF OUR APOSTLE, PAUL

We often think of Paul with great success when it comes to numbers; but it is he who revealed the “*not many*” principle (I Corinthians 1:26-29). However, the “*not many*” of Paul’s ministry was quite like the 32,000 of Gideon’s army, and God would reduce Paul’s “*not many*,” for they, too, were in fact “*too many*.”

When we get to the end of Paul’s ministry we find that the “*not many*” were as drastically reduced as were Gideon’s army, and that, “*all they*

who are in Asia are turned away from me” (II Timothy 1:15). The situation was so bleak that, when Paul first appeared on trial before the authorities in Rome, not a single soul stood with him. He stood on trial all alone. “*At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me*” (II Timothy 4:16).

After nearly 30 years of self-sacrificing ministry, after 4 perilous apostolic journeys, after 13 glorious letters written to the Body of Christ, Paul, preparing to face death, could only name four men who had remained faithful.

We can count them on one hand. There was, of course, Paul, and Luke who was with him (II Timothy 4:11). Then there was Timothy, and Mark who was with him (II Timothy 4:11); and there is Tychicus (II Timothy 4:12). Tally them: five faithful men.

If we follow Paul and his liberating message of grace, we, too, will be diminished in size. Men in their self-righteousness will not tolerate freedom and grace. Yet we will not be discouraged by this diminishing, for God has given us the celestial perspective. We will realize that only those who have “*ears to hear*” can, in fact, “*hear*.” We will be content to share the glorious truths that God has given us, with those whom He has prepared to hear.

God’s work through time is not about calling the masses of mankind to Himself; if so, He has failed miserably. His present work is in calling a small “*firstfruits*.” The full harvest will be reaped in due time, with no one left out. It will be our joyous privilege to be the vessels of the Father in bringing in the rest of creation’s harvest. We are now in the stage of our divine preparation – a place where even the “*not many*” are often “*too many*.”

WILLINGNESS TO WALK ALONE WITH GOD

“*Look to Abraham ... for I called him alone ...* (Isaiah 51:2).

Abraham was called “*the friend of God*” (James 2:23). This friendship with God called him to ►

a place of being “alone;” for indeed God had “called him alone.”

wherever He may lead us, even if at times we must do so only with Him.

This is to be the expected lot of those who would walk with God. Man often has an affinity for groups; a longing to be “a part of something.” We all naturally love and value the fellowship and companionship of others; but more often than not God calls His Own to walk on a solitary road with Him. Walking with Him requires a willingness to go alone if necessary. We must be willing to forgo the many voices of comfort and encouragement, of appreciation and respect. He calls us away from the noise of all of this into the quiet place of His love.

WALKING AS AN INDIVIDUAL BELIEVER

Otis Sellers (1901-1992) wrote compellingly about this great principle in his work *Christian Individualism: A Way of Life for the Active Believer in Jesus Christ* (1961):

Christian individualism does not mean that the believer stands alone. But it does mean that he knows how to stand alone, and that he will without complaint stand happily alone if he deems it to be a part of the worthy walk of his calling. He does not need to look to the right or to the left to see what someone else is going to do. He has a profound sense of his personal responsibility to God, therefore, he will put Him first and every other consideration must be subservient.

While he earnestly desires fellowship and community with others, he refuses to allow this desire to be the reigning influence of his life. He dislikes isolation and aloneness as much as anyone, yet he will not compromise in order to belong. He cannot yield allegiance to any organization, since all organizations are composed of human beings who err and whose judgments are always less than divine truth.”

If necessary, may God embolden our hearts to find in Him alone our companionship. May He give us the grace and strength to walk with Him

NOT GETTING VERY FAR

So then neither is he who plants anything, neither he who waters; but God Who gives the increase (I Corinthians 3:7).

Does it sometimes seem that you are not getting very far?

A part of the world’s view of success is the idea of “getting far” – whatever that may mean. Did you ever consider that you might be laboring under an unspiritual expectation? Did you ever think that, just maybe, that “far” place to which you are trying to get was not, in fact, God’s plan for you after all?

During most of all of my adult life, as I have learned truth and attempted to share and live it, there has always been someone with an objection such as, “You are not going to *get very far* teaching that!” Is that my aim? To get very far?

In reference to the issue of proclaiming the gospel, Tony Smith wisely answers the objection of not getting very far:

When it comes to proclaiming the evangel, I am not trying to get ... very far. Instead, I just go wherever my Master sends me, and where I go, when I get there and who I speak to when I do is entirely up to Him. He does not need or require my works to complete His purpose. If all of us were never to say another word about the evangel, then the rocks would shout it out.

It is not about us: our abilities, our failures, our successes. After all, is He not in charge? Does He not work all things after the counsel of His Own will? Why not abandon the expectation of “getting very far,” and just leave the results up to Him?

For you see your calling, brothers, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called (I Corinthians 1:26).

I Am ... Who and What God Says I am

The Divine Reckoning of the Renewed Mind

Part 5

by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

I AM ... TRIUMPHANT

Now thanks to God, Who always causes us to triumph in Christ ... (II Corinthians 2:14).

I am triumphant. This is who and what Father says I am.

Victory in Christ is Father's gift to me. It already belongs to me; it is my possession.

... Thanks to God, Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 15:57).

Father "gives us the victory." It is already mine. This is why Paul says that I am *more* than a conqueror!

... We are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us (Romans 8:37).

Triumphant victory is the gift God has given to me. It is part of the core of who I am as His son. It is in no way tied to the condition of my circumstances – of what situations I may or may not face, of what lot I may have in life. These all are but the scenery of my life. They need not have any control over who I really am. Though the circumstances of life may at times appear bleak, I remember that they are just that – only circumstances. They are not my God; they in no way determine my true victory. With God I can face any situation, regardless of how difficult or trying it may appear to be.

I am mindful that Paul had such troublesome circumstances at times that it caused him to be "pressed out of measure, above strength, inasmuch that we despaired even of life" (II Corinthians 1:8). Yet, in spite of these situations, he knew that he was truly victorious, always triumphant in Christ.

"More than conquerors"? How am I *MORE* than a conqueror? Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813-1843) offers a two-fold answer.

1. We conquer even before the battle is done. In all other battles we do not know how the victory is to turn out until the battle is won. In the battle of Waterloo, it was long thought that the French had gained; and Napoleon sent several dispatches to Paris, telling that he had won. But ... we know how the victory is to turn out already. Christ has engaged to carry us through ... The thicker the battle, the closer will He keep to us; so that we can sing already, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." We know that we shall overcome. Though the world were a million times more enraged – though the fires of persecution were again to be kindled – though my heart were a million times more wicked – though all the temptations were let loose upon me – I know I shall overcome through Him that loved me. When Paul and Silas sang in the low dungeon, they were more than conquerors. When Paul sang, in spite of his thorn, "I will glory in my infirmities," he was more than a conqueror.

2. We gain by our conflict. Often a victory is at a loss ... In most victories, the song of triumph is mingled with the sobbings of the widow and orphan. Not so in the good fight of faith. We are more than conquerors. We gain by our enemies. (a) We cling closer to Christ. Every wave of trouble for Christ's sake lifts the soul higher upon the Rock. Every arrow of bitterness shot after the believer makes him hide farther back in the clefts of Jesus. Be content, dear friend, to bear these troubles, which make you cling closer to your Beloved. (b) They shake us loose from sin. If ye were of the world, the world would ►

love its own. If the world smiled and fawned upon you, you would lie on its lap. But when it frowns, then Jesus is our all. (c) Great is your reward in heaven. We gain a brighter crown. Be not afraid; nothing shall ever separate you from the love of Christ ... If God be for you, who can be against you? If God has chosen you – called you – washed you – justified you – then He will glorify you. – (*Who Shall Separate Us?*)

I am who and what Father says I am.

I am victorious – triumphant – more than a conqueror.

I AM ... HIS WORKMANSHIP

For we are His workmanship (Ephesians 2:10).

I am His workmanship.

Regardless of how things may appear at times in my life, I am His workmanship! This is who and what Father says I am. Or, as the *Concordant Version* renders this phrase,

For His achievement are we.

I am His achievement! How settling and reassuring this truth is to my heart. Father is busy achieving something in me, regardless of how I see things, or feel about them – He is at work in me!

*Now unto Him Who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that **works in us*** (Ephesians 3:20).

*For it is God Who **works in you** both to will and to do of His good pleasure* (Philippians 2:13).

*From Whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to **the effectual working** in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love* (Ephesians 4:16).

William R. Newell well articulated the basis of the distresses of the Christian life when he wrote:

To “hope to be better” is to fail to see yourself in

Christ only.

To be disappointed with yourself is to have believed in yourself.

To be discouraged is unbelief – as to God’s purpose and plan of blessing for you.

I am not self-made; I am God-made – I am **His workmanship**, *His achievement*. The Great, Wise and Almighty God of the universe is steadily at work in my life – and He doesn’t do just any kind of work: He does masterpieces.

He has been skillfully at work in my life from day one. He has been carrying out His purpose, even if I was not aware of it at all times; and, as He always does, He is doing a good job, and accomplishing His purpose.

For it is God Who works in you ... (Philippians 2:13).

... It is He Who made us, and not we ourselves; we are His ... (Psalm 100:3).

Father began His good work in me, and He will complete it all the way to the end.

Being confident of this very thing, that He Who began a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).

In the end God always looks at His handiwork and says, “It is good.”

Since my Father is at work in me – and I am His masterpiece, and He will perform His work all the way out to its full glorious completion – then will I receive praise from the Lord.

*... And then shall **every man** have praise of God* (I Corinthians 4:5).

This truth relieves me from needless fretting, anxiety, frustration and discouragement. After all, He is God. He is in charge. He is the Creator, and I am His creation.

I am who and what Father says I am.

I am His workmanship.

