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Volume XVI
Issue 379

The Abuse of Tongues at Corinth

An Examination of I Corinthians 14

by — Robert C. Brock

In this study, our attention is going to be centered on *speaking in tongues*.

BACKGROUND

The first mention of speaking in tongues is found in Mark 16:17.

These signs shall follow them that believe; In My name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues.

According to the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven (the only gospel known at that time), speaking in tongues was a sure indication of faith. The Greek word for “*tongues*” is *glossa*, meaning “tongue, language.” It is used of the tongue in one’s mouth and of communicating with one another by the use of words. I will use these two meanings interchangeably.

The fulfillment of the promise of Mark 16:17 is found in Acts 2:4.

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

According to :6-11, those who heard them speak in languages understood clearly what was being said. The Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven was proclaimed in many foreign languages to Jews who had come to Jerusalem from all parts of that section of the world.

Speaking in languages is mentioned in only three books of the New Testament: Mark (16:17), Acts (2:4, 11; 10:46; 19:6), I Corinthians (12:10, 28; 14).

Speaking in languages was a gift, because the one who had this gift could speak in a foreign language immediately without having to learn it. This is what happened on the Day of Pentecost and at other times as well.

SITUATION AT CORINTH

The condition of the believers in Corinth needs to be taken into consideration when dealing with this subject. In I Corinthians 3:1-3, Paul called the believers “*carnal*” twice and “*babes in Christ*” once. He also said that they were not spiritual, and that he could not feed them with the meat of the Word but with milk, because they were not able to digest the solid teaching of the Word of God.

The speaking in tongues mentioned in I Corinthians 12 and 14 is the same gift mentioned in the book of Acts. The epistle of I Corinthians was written during the history of the book of Acts. There is no indication that this gift of languages ever changed or became different in character or purpose. Paul and

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Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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This free weekly electronic 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 (I 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 (I 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 freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

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Strictly Personal

Those of you who receive the printed-edition of the BSN have probably noticed our mailing list size once again qualifies us to use USPS bulk mailing. This not only reduces our per-piece postage costs, but also provides the opportunity to publish additional pages in each issue. *First Class* restricted us to an 8-page issue. We are now offering 12-pages as our weekly standard, giving us space to do more of what we desire in each issue.

Hospitality

Our home is used as a place of refreshment and encouragement, not only by our own immediate household, but by many others as well.

You may've heard us extend an invitation to come and visit. Some have believed us, and taken us up on the offer! To each of you we say, "Thank you!"

October–December we had 52 different guests. Some came for only a day, some spent a night, others a few, some even came back! (For a total of 81 daytime stays; and 123 overnight stays). While here, they found fellowship, answers to their questions, relaxation and rest for their spirits.

We do have dedicated guest space and we're currently working on an online calendar that will show our family activities and who's scheduled to visit us, so it will make it easier for *you* to make your plans to come. In the meantime, you'll have to e-mail, or call.

Now, our only question is, "When are *you* coming?"

Weight Gain & Weight Loss

Have you ever noticed how men are so mindlessly led along by the currents of their society? Often without even realizing it, our "choices" are thrust on us by the predetermined plots of others.

(see *EDITORIAL*, page 3400)



Our Mailbox

I really enjoy this ministry of yours. I learned of your ministry through a small leaflet that came with one of my [E.W. Bullinger](#) books. – *FL*

I thank Father for you and what He has given you, to give to me. I am at such a place of peace right now. Things are happening around me but I am in a place where I am almost detached from it all. It is hard to explain, but we, the Body of Christ, will be the vessels to show God's grace to others. I can see this working in me already. It is a small measure of God's grace but it is His grace for sure. I just wish I had the words to explain how I am feeling and what I see happening in me. – *NM*

Your book [World Affairs and National Politics](#) arrived just prior to the election. It was just what I needed to remind me that I am an ambassador here and that my citizenship is in Heaven. Thanks so much for the reminder.

I would also thank you for the information you sent concerning Martin Zender and the trial which Father is allowing in his personal life. I respect you even more when I read that you have taken him in during this difficult time. May God richly bless both of you through this. – *NC*

What a miraculous time to be alive in the Body of Christ! No one is left with an excuse not to exercise their faith, especially if they have a computer. Each morning I can't wait to get on-line. Clyde is always there with the [Daily Email Goodies](#) full of info and inspiration! Martin and Dan have their audio together and separate on their websites! Martin has his Zenderville and new audio for us and Dan has his written and oral teachings! And, now, James Flanders has his most refreshing and insightful audios on his website! Then, on CFBF we get periodic teachings from Stephen and Andre. And, of course, CPC is always available for reference study, especially with the new UR search engine! And Dan is proceeding with, what I believe will prove to be, a most important project of orally dividing and combining the CV translation with the commentary! What a miraculous time to be alive in the Body of Christ! – *LA*



TONGUES (continued from front page)

Luke used the same vocabulary when mentioning this gift. The only conclusion we can reach is that this was the same gift, and that God permitted the Gentile believers to possess this gift for a while during the Acts period.

Though the gift of speaking in languages was originally given to the Nation of Israel (Mark 16:17; Acts 2:4), a passage in Romans shows us that the early Gentiles also possessed these gifts.

Now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things (Romans 15:25-27).

Not only do we learn of the love of the saved Gentiles for their Jewish brethren, we also learn that the “spiritual things” are identical to those of I Corinthians 12 and 14:

- The “them” of Macedonia and Achaia of :26 are the Gentile believers of :27.
- In the Greek, the word “if” in :27 can also be translated “since.” The Gentile believers did participate in some of Israel’s spiritual things – their gifts.
- The “their” in the phrase “their spiritual things” refers to the Jewish saints (:27).
- The “spiritual things” of :27 is the same Greek word used in I Corinthians 12:1 and 14:1, translated “spiritual.” It is the Greek word *pneumatikos*, meaning “spiritual,” and is neuter plural in all three verses. It should have been translated “spiritual things.” The KJV has the word “gifts” in italics. The idea of “gifts” comes from I Corinthians 12:4 where “gifts” is used.
- There are no “unknown” tongues or languages. The KJV inserted in italics the word “unknown”

six times in I Corinthians 14 (:2, 4, 13, 14, 19, 27). There is no corresponding word in the Greek text. This has led to some very bad theology regarding this subject, even including the idea of speaking in a heavenly or angelic language. All of the languages spoken in Acts 2 were known languages. (In the quotation of the above verses, the word “unknown” has been left out in order to communicate the right concept from the Greek).

THE ABUSES

In I Corinthians 14, Paul mentioned eight abuses of speaking in tongues. During that time, it was proper to speak in languages, and Paul even encouraged them to do so (I Corinthians 14:39), but it had to be done correctly in order to please the Lord.

The whole letter of I Corinthians is corrective in its purpose, and chapter 14 is an excellent example of this. When this chapter is studied along with Acts 2, the contrast is striking.

Abuse #1

The believers at Corinth spoke to God. This is seen in :2.

He that speaketh in a tongue speaketh not unto men but unto God.

In Acts 2, the believers spoke to men of their own race,

There were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men... every man heard them speak in his own language (Acts 2:5-6).

The Corinthians were guilty of completely reversing God’s purpose of speaking in languages. In Acts 2, the purpose of this gift was to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven to the Jews gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. In Corinth, they used this gift in speaking to God, which of course was unnecessary, because they could speak to God in their native language. This was an abuse of a God-given gift, and it led to other abuses which are mentioned in I Corinthians 14.

Abuse #2

The Corinthians spoke in mysteries.

For no man understandeth him; *howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries* (:2).

In Acts 2, those who spoke in languages spoke the works of God. Acts 2:11 states,

Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

What a contrast!

At Corinth, those who spoke in mysteries could not be understood *by men*. Why? Because the word “mystery” here is understood in a bad sense of referring to the mystery religions that abounded among the heathen. Mysteries are secrets, and regardless of whether they were good secrets or bad secrets, the Corinthians could not understand each other. However, those mentioned in Acts 2 understood what was spoken to them.

Abuse #3

The Corinthians edified *themselves* by the use of this gift.

He that speaketh in a tongue edifies himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church (:4).

The contrast is not with Acts 2 here, but with another gift – the gift of prophecy. They were using the gift of languages to edify themselves rather than the gift of prophecy, which includes the element of teaching. Paul showed in a number of verses in I Corinthians 14 that the gift of prophecy was more important than the gift of languages (:5, 12, 24-25).

The word “edify” means “to build up,” and the things that edify are Divine love (I Corinthians 8:1) and the gifts of Ephesians 4:11-12, which include prophecy. The gift of languages cannot edify anyone. Using a gift for personal edification is wrong.

Abuse #4

The Corinthians used this gift for praying.

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful (:14).

Notice what :15 says.

What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

Paul meant that when you pray to God, the spirit and the mind are to be in agreement, knowing what is said. The same goes for singing. This would rule out the gift of languages as a tool for praying to God. The gift of tongues was not given for the purpose of praying to God. A believer is to pray to God in the language he or she commonly uses. This is the language God expects us to use when praying.

Abuse #5

The Corinthians exercised this gift in relation to believers.

Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe but to them that believe not (:22).

This verse confirms the fact that this gift is the same gift that was performed in Acts 2. The gift of languages is a *sign gift*, and our Lord also mentioned this in Mark 16:17.

These signs shall follow them that believe ... they shall speak with new tongues.

The Jewish people required signs from God.

For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom (I Corinthians 1:22).

The Corinthians reversed the direction of this gift. Instead of exercising the gift in the presence of the unsaved, like they did at Pentecost, they spoke in languages in the presence of believers. It was the gift of prophecy that was for believers, not the gift of languages.

But prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe (:22). ►



The Corinthians were confused. This was due to their carnal condition, and because of the fact that they were babes in Christ.

Abuse #6

The believers spoke in tongues all at once.

If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? (:23, also see :26).

This abuse caused the unsaved to think that the believers were mad. Speaking in languages all at once only created confusion, noise and an uproar. God is not of confusion (:33).

Paul laid down rules for the exercise of this gift.

If any man speak in a tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church (:27-28).

Speaking in languages was to be done one at a time, in turn (this is what “by course” means), and not more than three men could do this. This presented an orderly way of conducting the gift, so that maximum benefit could be had from it. An interpreter was absolutely

necessary because an interpreter translated the foreign language into the native language of the hearers. If there was no interpreter, there was to be no speaking in languages. Paul closed this chapter by saying,

Let all things be done decently and in order (:40).

Abuse #7

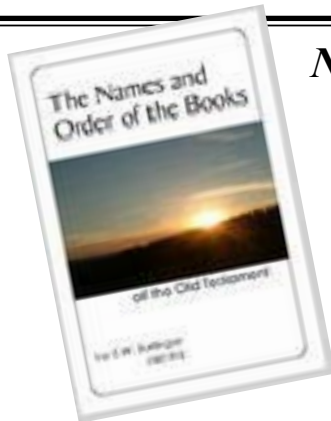
The believers were speaking in tongues without an interpreter.

But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God (:28)

Their abuse of tongues and of interpretation led to the writing of this verse. The Greek word used for “interpret” basically means “to translate.” The one having this gift had the immediate ability to translate from the spoken language into the language of those who heard. If one wanted to speak in languages, but there was no one to translate for him, then he was to be silent.

Abuse #8

Speaking in tongues was done mostly by the women in the Church. It was the men who were to be the leaders in the Church, not the women. This is why Paul had to write :34-35.



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Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

Leadership was to be in the hands of the men in the local assemblies. This is why there were to be elders, bishops and deacons in a local Church. The women who spoke in languages took away some aspects of leadership from the men. Speaking in tongues was very impressive, and those who exercised it frequently would be looked up to as leaders. That was the danger that needed to be corrected.

Results

What kind of results were brought about by the abuse of this gift? There are five of them. Were they good results or bad results?

1. The gift of languages did not produce understanding among the unbelievers.
2. Speaking tongues all at once produced confusion.
3. They refused to accept Paul's authority.

If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord (:37).¹

4. In refusing to accept Paul's authority, they remained ignorant of the truth.

But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant (:38).²

LENGTH OF THE GIFT

How long was this gift of tongues supposed to last?

1. Paul wrote a number of times that the message he preached was received from the risen Lord (Galatians 1:11-12; Ephesians 3:3; 2 Corinthians 12:1, 7).
2. If one did not agree with Paul and wanted to argue with him, Paul was not going to fight with him about the truth. He would just let him remain in his ignorant condition. This ignorant condition stems from a closed mind – an unteachable mind.

The answer to this question is found in I Corinthians 13:8-11.

*Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be **tongues, they shall cease**; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.*

This rich passage of God's Word is commonly called "The Love Chapter," but there is much more than that in it. It clearly teaches that tongues were only a *temporary* gift. In :8 three gifts of the Spirit are mentioned: the gift of prophecy, the gift of tongues and the gift of knowledge.

:8 distinctly teaches that all three gifts are *temporary*. The phrases in this passage ("shall fail," "shall vanish away," "shall be done away" and "put away") are the same Greek word that means "abolish." A literal translation illuminates this truth.

*Love never falls down, but whether prophecies, they will be abolished; or **languages, they will cease** of themselves; or knowledge, it will be abolished. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But whenever that which is finished may come, that which is in part will be abolished. When I was an infant, I was speaking as an infant, I was thinking as an infant, I was reasoning as an infant; when I have become a man, I have abolished the things of the infant.*

The Scriptures state that the gift of tongues will cease of themselves. The verb "cease" is in the middle voice as indicated by "of themselves." This gift would eventually die out on its own. There is no biblical indication that it would be brought back to be practiced again by believers in our Dispensation of Grace.

The ending of the gift of tongues took place at the close of Acts 28. This chapter represents a very important biblical boundary line in God's dealings with the human race. It was here that God tem- ►



porarily suspended His plans and purposes for the Nation of Israel (Acts 28:25-28). Tongues were for a “sign” (I Corinthians 14:22; Mark 16:17), and the Jews required a “sign” (I Corinthians 1:22). Since God is not now dealing with the Nation of Israel, there is no need for “signs.”

Today, untold numbers have the same attitude that the scribes and Pharisees had in Jesus’ day. We should take to heart our Lord’s reply to them in Matthew 12:38-39 when they asked Him about a sign,

Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, “Master, we would see a sign from Thee.” But He answered and said unto them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah.”

Believers are not to seek signs during this Administration of Grace.

The ending date of the book of Acts is generally given as around 62 AD. This time frame is further strengthened by the phrase “that which is finished” (I Corinthians 13:10), referring to the completion of the Word of God. Shortly after the gift of tongues died out, the Bible was completed by the Apostle Paul. His last letter, II Timothy, was written around 67 AD, completing the Word of God. Paul wrote these words in Colossians 1:25 “to fulfill the Word of God.” The word “fulfill” is translated “complete” in Colossians 2:10, “And ye are complete in Him.” “Complete” is the mean-

ing of the particular Greek word used in Colossians 1:25, and would read “to complete the Word of God.”

The completion of the Word of God is what is meant in I Corinthians 13:10. “When that which is perfect [or finished] may come” refers to the Scripture.

I Corinthians 13:11 is the practical application of :8-10. Paul stated that he spoke as an infant when he was an infant. This Greek word for “infant” is translated “babes” in I Corinthians 3:1. The Corinthian believers should have noticed the connection in the use of this Greek word. Speaking in languages was related to being an infant or babe, and they were to abolish (“put away”) those things when they grew up to be mature adults in the Lord. Just as infancy is a temporary part of life, the gifts of the Spirit were to be exercised for a temporary period of time.

Consider I Corinthians 13:13,

Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Something is left out of this verse. There is no mention of the sign-gifts. The only things that count with God today are “faith, hope and love.”

Please notice the time word, “**Now**.” Faith, hope and love are the important things *now*!

1985

EDITORIAL (continued from page 3395)

Let’s use the seasonal media and advertising as an example of the manipulation of an entire society.

Every year, during the last 9 weeks of the calendar, that block of Halloween-Thanksgiving-Christmas-New Year’s Day, we are bombard with an endless parade of food, candy and sweets that we are encouraged to buy and prepare. Why? Well, because we are just supposed to. After all it is the “Holiday season,” and as a result, we gain weight.

Then at the beginning of the year they want to sell us weight loss pills, diet books, exercise equipment and gym memberships. They attempt to profit from

our weight gain, and then from our weight loss; and many of us mindlessly follow their lead.

Vanity of vanities (Ecclesiastes 1:2).

Until next week, dear ones,



Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

The Interweaving of the Days

by — J.R. Miller (1840-1912)

This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it (Psalm 118:24).

It is a good thing to learn to *live by the day*. We should devote all of our strength to the doing well of each day's tasks, and then should disengage ourselves altogether from its entanglements.

One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind (Philippians 3:13).



Emerson puts it well:

Finish every day – and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day; begin it well and serenely; and with too high a spirit to be cumbered with your old nonsense. *Today* is all that is good and fair. It is too dear, with its hopes and invitations, to waste a moment on the *yesterdays*.

Each day is a unit unto itself. *Today* is the day for which we are equipped by our Lord. It is to have the full focus of our attention.

As your days, so shall your strength be (Deuteronomy 33:25).

Little wonder that our Lord spoke these pertinent words concerning our tomorrows.

Take therefore no thought for tomorrow: for tomorrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof (Matthew 6:34).

Yet as important as is the duty of fencing off the days and keeping them *separate* – there is a sense in which no day stands alone. The days are *links in an endless chain*. Each day receives an inheritance from yesterday, and at its close passes it down to the day which comes after. We start every new day with all of the *knowledge* gathered during the years that are gone. We have also the *experience* of the past by which our lives have been

enriched, or possibly hurt. We are bound up, too, in the associations and friendships which have been formed. In countless ways, yesterday's life and today's are intertwined. Each day is but a little section of a *great web*, containing one figure of the pattern, the warp running through all of the days and years. A life is a serial story, opening with infancy, closing with death, and each day is *one little chapter* in the story.

We best prepare for *tomorrow*, when we make *today* beautiful with truth and faithfulness. Today is the blossom, tomorrow is the fruit. Today is the sowing, tomorrow is the harvest. Far more than we realize does tomorrow depend upon today. Every minute is a key which strikes a note somewhere in the future.

If we had any true concept of the relation of early studies and discipline to future power and success, they would think no work too hard, no study too exhausting in order to make ready for their chosen calling. It is said that one of Turner's great sea-pictures has been sold recently for a great sum of money. It is well known that Turner gave the closest attention to details. It is said, for instance, that he once spent a whole day on the shore of a quiet lake, tossing pebbles into the water, to study the effect of the sunlight on the ripples as they were started by the stone and spread over the lake's surface. His companions teased him on having wasted his day, as he had nothing to carry back to show for his visit to the lake. "But I have learned how the ripples look," he replied. "I think I shall be able to get something out of the day after all."

Turner's day was not wasted. It is to such *patient attention to minute details* in preparation, that his great pictures owe their wonderful perfection and beauty. Behind all worthy success lies ever a *preparation* almost infinitely painstaking. Let us never despise routine, technique, drill, discipline, in the days of training.

One tells of seeing a builder idly picking up a piece of wood as he stood talking to a friend. He turned it over

(see *INTERWEAVING*, next page)

I Am What I Am

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

By the grace of God I am what I am (I Corinthians 15:10).

I am what I am." This is the truth of Scripture! We are not self-created, self-made or self-determined. We are exactly what we are because we are *the created*, and we have so been fashioned. Being God's *creature*, He has made us precisely who we are.

Of course, in a larger context, He is continually *making* us who we are. That is, His achievement in all of us is an *ongoing* work that will find its final result only when He is completely done with His masterpiece.

The only thing that makes us different from the majority of those around us is *timing*. God's steady work of cre-



ation has always involved the *time* element and, as in the resurrection, in every aspect of His work in all mankind – whether it is birth, realization of the truth, glorification, etc. – is **"every man in his own order"** (I Corinthians 15:23).

We, who are the **"Called"** – the **"First Trusters,"** the **"First Fruits"** – are simply farther along in Father's handiwork than the rest of His creation.

He is doing an *early* work in us. Thus, at times His hand can be more easily identified in our lives than in those around us. Then we can, along with Paul – out of God-given faith – rejoice that, *by Father's grace we are what we are*. It is only the *timing* of His grace that makes the difference. ■

INTERWEAVING (continued from previous page)

in his hands and said, "See what a beautiful piece of oak this is. Notice the fineness of its grain. This wood will take a higher polish than a piece of ordinary oak. Can you guess why this is?" he asked. His companion could not answer, "Well, it is because the tree from which it came had to endure a great deal of buffeting. It did not grow in a forest, sheltered by other trees. It stood apart in some field alone, and this wood gets its delicate grain from the battle with the elements which it had to wage through all its history as a tree. It was beaten on every side, and it was this experience of hardness, which has given to this piece of wood such an exquisite quality of fiber."

What is true of trees is true also of men: they grow best – into the finest character, into manliest strength, the noblest influence – in a life of struggle and toil. The easy life may seem more pleasant today, but it does not fit us for masterful and victorious life tomorrow.

Our tomorrow is connected to our today. When men build a great ship to go out on the sea, they store away in its frame enormous reserves of strength – staunch ribs of iron, immense beams and stays, massive plates of steel. If the vessel was being built to sail only on some peaceful river or even to go on the ocean in quiet days, it would be a wasteful expenditure at such large cost to put such enormous strength in her frame. However, the

builders are wisely equipping the ship for the most terrific storms she may ever have to encounter.

Today God is preparing us for our future. God is in all our life and His

Mercies ... are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23).

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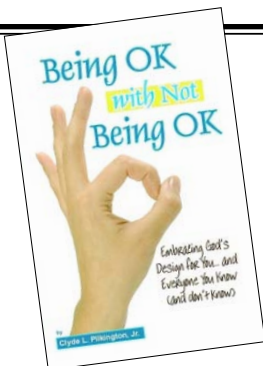
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