

THE

HARVESTER

"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest." [Luke 10:2]

JUNE 1993

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I MUST DECREASE

John the Baptist had a definite purpose in life. His job was to turn the hearts of the people back toward God and to tell them about the coming of the Messiah (John 1:6-8). He was the forerunner of Christ and he knew the time was near to turn over his ministry to Jesus. But some of John's disciples were confused. They were concerned when more people started to gather with Jesus and not with their teacher (John 3:26). To all this John answered, *"He must increase, but I must decrease"* (John 3:30). John was referring to the importance between Jesus and himself. He knew that Jesus would now complete God's plan of salvation. John's work was finished. The time

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had come for a greater distance to be placed between the two and John was able to recognize this!

In the same respect, when a person becomes a Christian, he must realize: "Christ must increase, but I must decrease". Our Lord should become more significant in our lives and our own importance should decrease. But many people fail to recognize this. That is why some members of the Lord's church never seem to grow much after baptism. They have not allowed Christ to "increase" and themselves to "decrease".

When we are baptized into the death of Jesus Christ, *"our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin"* (Rom. 6:6). That means that our old way of life is to be put away. *"Old things are passed away"* (2 Cor. 5:17). Our former priorities must decrease in importance. What used to be very prominent to me in this earthly life will now play second fiddle to what is valuable in my spiritual life as a disciple of Christ. Not everyone is willing to make that commitment!

Our "old" motives and our old manner of life also decreases. Being baptized and thus, crucifying the *"old man"* says that our "old" feelings, our thoughts, our beliefs, and our opinions take a backseat to God. *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."* (Isa. 55:8,9)

If we fail to "decrease" our former self, it is very unlikely that the Lord will be able to "increase" in our new life. Christ cannot dwell in me if I refuse to make room for Him.

For example, before I can stuff extra coins into a full piggy bank, I must first remove some of the coins inside. Similarly, I must "decrease" all of my selfish desires to the point that there is enough room for Christ to "increase" His importance in my heart. I have to clear some space, spiritually speaking, by getting rid of the "old man of sin". So, the big step in Christian maturity is that I must decrease in mine own importance.

No longer should I live with the attitude of "I WILL do this and I WILL do that ..." That was the exact attitude of Lucifer in Isaiah 14:13,14 and of the Rich Fool in Luke 12:18,19. They were so busy thinking of themselves, of their wants and desires that they had little time for the things that really mattered: *"the kingdom of God and all his righteousness"* (Matt. 6:33). If Christ is going to truly "increase" in us, then we must "decrease"! It can no longer be MY will, but it must be God's will FIRST in all things!

How does one "decrease"? The answer may lie in remembering that upon conversion, we no longer belong to ourselves. When we are added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:47), we are called Christians (Acts 11:26). That literally means we become a possession of Jesus Christ. Our body now belongs to God (1 Cor. 6:19). Therefore we become servants of Christ, to obey His every command.

Part of our conversion insists that we imitate the One whom we now serve (1 Jn. 2:6). He gave us plenty of examples to follow (John 13:15). So, when we learn to be more humble, more patient, more temperate, more self-denying, ... in short, more Christ-like, then we are "decreasing" self and letting the influence of Jesus Christ "increase"! When we do good works and let our light shine before

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men (Matt. 5:16), the world will see NEW creatures. They will see different and 'peculiar' people, whose "old man" has decreased and Christ has increased.

Ephesians 5:18 tells us to "Be filled with the Spirit". How will that be possible if we are filled with "self"? Once again, we are reminded of the full piggy bank that we must first "decrease" before the "increase" can take place. Until we let God's spirit dwell in us and dominate our actions, we cannot truly say we have been converted and changed. We must have the Spirit of Christ abide in us before we can live as a Christian (Rom. 8:9).

John the Baptist pointed out an important but forgotten step in the growth of every Christian when he said of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease". After baptism many people fail to realize that they must continue to "decrease" before Christ can "increase" any more. After baptism, "they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:15). May God grant us the courage to agree, "I must decrease!"

RAY McMANUS

PRAYER IS BEING INTIMATE WITH GOD.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. Who took some bread, some water, and her son and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba?
2. What country was the power of the seas, in Ezekiel?
3. According to John 15, what happens to branches that are thrown away and wither?
4. With what was the woman in Revelation 17 drunk?
5. What kind of bird did Noah send out that came back to the ark?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. According to the book of Numbers, how long was a person who touched a corpse considered unclean? SEVEN DAYS (Num. 19:11)
2. After Abraham's sojourn in the land of the Philistine, God did something to him. What was it? GOD TESTED HIM (Gen. 22:1)
3. What must a man be able to manage before he may be able to manage God's church? HIS OWN FAMILY (1 Tim. 3:5)
4. What reflects the man as water reflects a face? HIS HEART (Prov. 27:19)
5. Why did Peter write his letters? SO HIS READERS WOULD REMEMBER THE TRUTHS HE TAUGHT EVEN AFTER HIS DEATH (2 Pet. 1:13-15)

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| <p>WHEN SUCCESS TURNS A MAN'S HEAD, HE FACES FAILURE.</p> |
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JUDGING OURSELVES UNWORTHY OF EVERLASTING LIFE

(Editor's Note: The following article was submitted as the first in a series of four bulletins. Parts 2, 3 and 4 will be published in the coming months.)

Text: "And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached the next sabbath. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who speaking to them persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against these things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing you put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." (Acts 13:42-46)

To expand on this thought let us consider other examples of wrong attitudes in regard to the Word of God, and everlasting life.

The Rich Young Ruler (Matt. 19:16-24) (Mk. 10:17-25)

He seemed on the surface to be very interested in everlasting life. He was informed by the Lord to keep the commandments (the 10 Commandments - Exodus 20:1-18). He thought he was on Easy Street then because he had cut his teeth on Judaism and had kept the commandments since he was a young boy. But

when he anxiously asked the question, "What lack I yet?", and was told . . .

1. Sell what you have
2. Give to the poor
3. Then you will have treasure in heaven
4. Come and follow me,

he was very rich and had great possessions, and the god of materialism choked out his opportunity to obey. So with a covetous heart he judged himself unworthy of everlasting life.

What about us today? Are we guilty of the same?

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also:" (Matt. 6:19-21)

"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:" (Col. 3:5)

"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. . . ." (1 Tim. 6:6-12)

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GOSPEL MEETINGS

| <u>Dates</u> | <u>Place & Time</u> | <u>Speaker</u> |
|---------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| June 4 - 6 | Fayetteville Road Atlanta, GA | Wilbur Bass (Auburn, AL) |
| June 6 - 11 (Su-F) | Hokes Bluff Church Gadsden, AL 7:00 pm / 10:30 & 6:00 Sun. | Sam Dick (Cave City, KY) |
| June 6 - 11 | Taylor's Crossroads Roanoke, AL | Chris Melton (Valley, AL) |
| June 6 - 11 | Wesley Ave. Church Thomaston, GA | Lindeal Greer (Bogue Chitto, MS) |
| June 11 - 13 (F-Su) | Pleasant Grove Church near Alex City, AL 7:00 pm / 10:30 & 6:00 Sun. | Doug Farmer (Pisgah, AL) |
| June 13 - 18 | Mt. Carmel Church Woodland, AL | Ricky Murphy (Woodland, AL) |
| June 14 - 18 | Camp meeting Chula Vista, AL | Various Speakers |
| June 20 - 25 | Ephesus, GA | Bill Prince (Oxford, AL) |
| June 20 - 25 | Cold Springs Church Bogue Chitto, MS | James McDonald (Woodbury, TN) |
| June 20 - 26 | Athens, KY | Sam Dick (Cave City, KY) |
| June 27 - July 2 | Valley, AL | Harry Cobb (Wedowee, AL) |
| June 28 - July 2 | New Bethel Church Cullman, AL | James McDonald (Woodbury, TN) |
| July 5 - 13 | Cloud Nine Church Sierra Vista, AZ | Sam Dick (Cave City, KY) |