

The Christian's Legacy

I drive on a portion of the United States' Interstate Highway System at least six days of the average week. Monday through Friday, I depend on the Interstate highways to go to work. On the Sabbath, I travel for about fifty miles on Interstate 70 to attend services. Millions of Americans rely on our marvelous system of interstate highways as they travel to work, to conduct personal business and for fun and recreational purposes.

It is likely that most Americans take this modern convenience for granted. We in the USA probably also take for granted the freedom which allows us to travel anywhere in our country that the 43,000 miles (or nearly 72,000 kilometers) of Interstate Highway System will take us. It should be noted that the system of roads we're discussing is actually called the "Dwight D. Eisenhower National System of Interstate and Defense Highways". Dwight Eisenhower, when he was President of the United States, was instrumental in launching the project to build this great transportation network, the largest public works project in history. It is a part of his legacy. The story of how Eisenhower left this legacy is one of those fascinating stories resulting from random connections of people and events.

The tale begins in 1919. Having just returned to the United States from Europe, following the First World War, General John J. Pershing became concerned with the Country's ability to mobilize men and materiel in case of a national emergency or attack by a foreign power. In order to assess the condition of the Nation's roads, Pershing ordered a young army Captain, Dwight D. Eisenhower, to travel across country with a convoy of military vehicles and personnel.

Captain Eisenhower began his journey with eighty trucks. The trip took sixty days because of the wretched condition of the roads and bridges. Many bridges and sections of highway had to be repaired by the soldiers before they could be traversed. The convoy logged an average speed of only three and one half miles per hour on the journey. Pershing was convinced that our system of roads would be inadequate to deal with a national emergency but he was unable to persuade the government to do anything about it. It was felt that the railroads would provide adequate transportation if the need arose. Nothing was done with Pershing's idea for forty years.

During World War II, General Dwight D. Eisenhower was able to study Germany's efficient superhighway system. The Autobahn had allowed the Nazis to move troops and equipment so efficiently that Eisenhower estimated that it had enabled Germany to resist the Allies for two additional years.

In 1956, President Eisenhower, inspired by the German Autobahn, proposed to Congress in his State of the Union message that an interstate highway system linking the lower forty-eight states be built. His plan was implemented and today, the Country benefits from the 43,000 miles of superior highway President Eisenhower built. This impressive achievement is a part of the legacy this man left to his nation.

Wouldn't it be satisfying to have a legacy such as the one created by Eisenhower? To have contributed in such a great way to the quality of life in the United States? To have done something that benefits hundreds of millions of people? I would like to show you that every Christian can have a legacy. The comparison between the Christian's legacy and that of Eisenhower may surprise you, because the Bible shows us that ordinary Christians can make enormous contributions which will endure forever.

One such Christian was Cornelius, a gentile whom God used to reveal an important truth to the apostles. His story is in the book of Acts:

ACTS 10:1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, 2 A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always. 3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. 4 And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Your prayers and your alms are come up for a memorial before God. 5 And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: 6 He lodges with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell you what you should to do. 7 And when the angel which spoke unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier

The Christian's Legacy

of them that waited on him continually; 8 And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

Cornelius was an ordinary man, a centurion, in charge of 80 soldiers. He wasn't a senator or even a general, but we know that the man had the character and courage that was required of a Roman Centurion. Additionally, he had earned a good reputation for his record of good works. He feared God, he gave generously to those in need, and he is described as devout. The fantastic thing about this man is that God not only took notice of his good deeds and prayers, but they were a reminder to God of the quality of character that set this man apart. They were a memorial of the man, a record to be kept perpetually in God's archives. That is impressive! This is a part of Cornelius' enduring legacy, recorded in Heaven. We should all aspire to follow Cornelius' example in this regard. We should desire to be in God's mind continually, as a memorial, for the good works we have done.

Because of Cornelius' sterling character, God used him to show the Church that gentiles could be members of the body of Christ. You may read the entire account of how that happened in the remainder of the 10th chapter of Acts. The acceptance of gentiles into the Church is another important aspect of the legacy of Cornelius, as he was used by God to bring about this change in understanding.

How about Christian women? Can they also contribute and leave behind something enduring and valuable? The story of a Christian woman living in Joppa, related in the book of Acts shows that they can.

ACT 9:36 -41 Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.

The fact that she was revived by Peter is incidental to the point. Tabitha was full of good works. She earned a reputation for giving, service and generosity. Her giving is eternally documented in the pages of the Bible. That is an incredible legacy. She will always be known for her works. Tabitha used her skills and talents to serve the congregation. Apparently, she focused on filling the needs of the widows. When she died, she was sorely missed. The people whom she had served were grieving for her when Peter arrived.

Cornelius and Tabitha used their resources and their gifts to add value to the church and the community. They shared their resources, their time, their money and they were remembered for their contributions. We must ask ourselves, "Will we be missed for the service we have given when we are gone?" Will we leave anything of value behind or will we vanish without a trace?

Today's Christians do indeed have opportunities to create lasting value for God and His kingdom, the Church and the community. How can today's Christian leave behind something of lasting value? There are many ways.

First, Christian parents have a valuable opportunity to leave behind them children who are educated in God's way of life and trained to follow it. Proverbs tell us that our children and our grandchildren are a legacy that we will leave to the world.

PRO 17:6 Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers.

If you are a parent, you have the opportunity to instill in your children golden character. Take the time to teach them the principles of Godly living, of giving and of the value of service. The character you build in your children will be

The Christian's Legacy

your crown. Tell them not to let the legacy of character die with them. They must pass it on to your children's children. Your children's inheritance has a physical and a spiritual component. The spiritual, good or bad, will endure long after the physical wealth is consumed. Bringing up our children in our faith is a legacy which should endure for generations and be self-perpetuating. This is an inheritance far greater than silver and gold.

Christians generate and leave behind them wealth by virtue of their service to God and to each other. They are ready to volunteer their time and resources on behalf of others who need help. Cornelius and Tabitha were sterling examples of Christian service and giving. When we use our talents and resources for the benefit of others, we are generating value for God as a financial manager does for his client. This principle is made clear in the parables of the pounds in a private lesson Jesus gave to His disciples:

MATTHEW 25:14 For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. 15 And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. 16 Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. 17 And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. 18 But he that had received one went and dug in the earth, and hid his lord's money. 19 After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoned with them. 20 And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou delivered unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. 21 His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. 22 He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou delivered unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. 23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. 25:24 Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: 25 And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. 26 His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knew that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: 27 Thou ought therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. 28 Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

Christ represents Himself in this parable as a wealthy investor who allows others to speculate with his resources. In the parable, all who step out in an attempt to generate profit for their client are successful. They generate wealth and profit for him. Those who don't try to gain an increase are no longer allowed to trade. All of us are given the opportunity to build wealth for the Lord. He endows each of us with resources that can and must be used for the benefit of God and the Church. Paul makes this clear in 1 Corinthians 12:

1CO 12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

Everyone receives gifts, although differing in magnitude and kind, to add value to the body of Christ, the Church. In this chapter, Paul describes the Church as the body of Christ. Each member of the church, being an organ of Christ's body, has something to contribute, some value to add to the health and well-being of the body. When we use the resources God gives us, we are adding lasting value to the church, building an inheritance and a legacy.

Lets compare the value of Eisenhower's legacy with that of the Christian. Perhaps it might seem that the modest works of a Christian cannot be compared with those of a man who helped save the free world from tyranny and built an impressive transportation system in the United States. If you tend to think this way, consider this: The works and the accomplishments of Captain Eisenhower, of General Eisenhower and President Eisenhower are physical, temporary and transitory. As Paul tells us, everything that we can see is going to have an end someday:

2CO 4:18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

The Christian's Legacy

The Interstate Highway System and indeed, the earth that supports it, are temporary structures. There is going to be an end to all physical things. Peter teaches us that the entire universe and the structure of matter itself will be dissolved one day, The Day Of the Lord, spoken of in many prophecies:

2PE 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. 11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, 12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

In the unlikely event that our highways will endure until the Day of the Lord, they will be consumed by cosmic heat, along with the earth, the sun, the moon and all the stars. Even after that event, however, the Christian's legacy will endure. It will endure in the character and teaching we have instilled in our children. When they inherit eternal life, that legacy will become eternal. It will endure in the record of good works and service we have contributed. These records will not be burned up with the earth, they will survive in God's archive. They will come up before Him continually as a memorial just as did those of Cornelius. Here is the lasting legacy of the Christian:

HEB 6:10 For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have served the saints, and do serve.

Christians have the power to make a contribution which will outlast history. God will never forget our contribution, our good works, the value we have added to His Family, His Kingdom. This is our enduring legacy.