



## What We Shall Be

by Rev. Jerry L. McGlone

### **I John 3:1-2**

*See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*

**I**t's that time of year again - the only time during the year when I watch baseball. Actually, I don't watch baseball this time of year every year, I only watch it if one or more of my favorite teams is in the playoffs.

I remember being a faithful fan back in the 1960's when the Cincinnati Redlegs would play in the World Series. The Big Red Machine was my favorite team. Back then the games would all be played in the afternoon. I used to take an old transistor radio to school with me so I could sit in study hall and listen to Pete Rose and Johnny Bench pound their opponents. Well, it's been a long time since I've had to worry about watching the Redlegs in the World Series.

But my other favorite team is the Yankees. So, I'll watch them, and root for them, and cheer when they win again.

One of the problems I have with baseball is that it's slow moving. Sometimes, it's just boring. In an attempt to keep the audience's interest through all those boring stretches, the announcers talk about a lot of things. One of their favorite items up for discussion during every game is the players' statistics.

There are a lot of statistics kept in that game. Most of them don't mean a thing to me. When the announcers start throwing out those numbers and averages, I don't pay any attention to them. I think the only reason for

keeping most of those statistics is so the announcers have something to talk about when the game is a real yawner.

But, there is one statistic that I understand. That's the batting average. I know that a 1,000 batting average is perfect. What that means is every time you went up to bat, you got a hit. No one has ever done that. I know that if you have a .333 average, that means one out of every three times you go up to bat you get a hit. On the down side, it also means that two out of every three times you go up, you get out.

The interesting thing about a batting average is if you have a .333 average in the major leagues, you'd probably be making 15 or 20 million dollars a year. Wouldn't it be great to get paid so much for being successful at your job one out of every three attempts?

Batting averages I understand. You can pick up the newspaper and read the statistics of your favorite player every day. Everybody can read about any player's batting average.

You're not out there playing baseball. You're not working on the diamond. You don't have to worry about your batting average, do you? You don't keep track of how many times you succeed and how many times you fail, do you?

Just suppose you did. If somebody out there kept track of your successes and failures on the job, or in your personal life; what would your averages be? If somebody kept track of your statistics, how would you like it if your averages were published every day? Can you imagine what it would be like if the local newspaper printed a daily update on your job performance so all you neighbors and friends could read all about it?

I don't think I would like it. I can just imagine the headline in tomorrow's Tonawanda News. "McGlone's Average Continues Plummet," it would scream. And the article would read: "The batting average of the Rev. Jerry L. McGlone continued it's month-long plummet yesterday as he went hitless in four times at bat.

"He suffered a called strike out when he learned after the fact that one of his parishioners had been hospitalized for two weeks. He was tagged out at first base after a disastrous bunt in which he hit into a double play as he

tripped on the stairs and fell head-first into the pulpit. Seemingly stunned from the fall, he struck out his next time at bat when he couldn't remember the name of the chairman of the Elders. And in his last attempt at bat, his sermon was a most disappointing pop-up to the infield."

Ouch! That would be some bad press.

Imagine what it would be like if your batting average at work and at home was figured out at the end of every day and appeared the next morning in bold newspaper headlines for everyone else to read. How would you like it?

"Yesterday, John Doe's slump continued as he went zero for four. He made a stupid, yet costly mistake on the job. Then, because he felt guilty, he chewed out his fellow workers. He grounded out with his children when he claimed he was too tired to play with them. And, he was thrown out of the game for arguing with his wife."

How would you like it?

Thank goodness, no one is keeping up-to-date statistics on you. That's good, isn't it? But then again, maybe that's bad.

Because it means:

Nobody is measuring you.

Nobody is timing you.

Nobody is keeping a record of how you're doing.

There's a danger if you're not being held accountable. Unless you are very careful, something unexpected might happen. You just might stop measuring yourself. Before you know it, you might start slowing down; you might slide into a familiar and comfortable rut. You might stop changing. You might stop growing.

Cardinal Newman once said, "Growth is the only evidence of life; whoever is not busy growing is busy dying."

The scriptures back that up.

The Apostle John put it this way: in his Gospel he wrote, “To all who received [Jesus]... he gave power to *become* children of God.” [John 1:12]

Later on, in his first letter, he wrote, “Here and now, dear friends, we are God’s children... what we *shall be* has not yet been disclosed...” [I John 3:2a]

Paul wrote the same thing, but he used different words: “My friends,” he wrote, “... all I can say is this: forgetting what is behind me, and *reaching out* for that which lies ahead, I *press on* toward the goal...” [Philippians 3:13]

They all say the same thing. The common denominator in every Christian life is growth: “*the power to be,*” “*what we shall be,*” “*reaching out for what lies ahead,*” “*pressing on!*”

The scriptures speak with one voice on the subject, and that one voice calls out for growth.

“*You’re not done yet,*” they say. “*The game’s not over yet.*” they say. “*Your average is not being kept,*” they say, “*but God still knows what you’re doing..*”

There are many important issues every church has to face these days, but the number one issue for every church and for every individual Christian is still the same. You and your church have to keep on growing:

- you’ve got to grow in numbers,
- you’ve got to grow spiritually,
- you’ve got to grow prayerfully,
- you’ve got to grow in fellowship,
  - in understanding,
  - in joy;
  - and, if you’re not growing, you’re dying.

You and your church have to grow. If you’re not growing, you’re not much good.

There are many ways you and your church can grow. I'm only going to mention two ways.

The first way you and your church can grow is through **ideas that stretch your mind**. If you want to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ, you and your church have to hear, consider, and embrace some new ideas.

We just celebrated Columbus Day. Back when I was a child, Columbus Day was a pretty important holiday. In school we'd talk about Columbus and remember what he did. Well, things have changed. Columbus isn't politically correct these days. These days, he's being judged by today's standards. He was a man of his time, and he's being criticized for it.

My niece, her husband, and their daughter live in suburban Columbus, Ohio. My niece's daughter had to go to school last Monday. Think about that, the public schools in the largest city in the United States named after Columbus, they don't even celebrate his day!

I may not be politically correct, because I still think Columbus was an important man in history. He is important because he had a new idea. He thought you could sail west into the unknown ocean and end up in the east! Everyone said it was a bad idea. Nobody wanted to listen to him.

Columbus took his new idea to the leader of the most powerful nation in the world. He went to visit the King of Portugal. At that point in history, Portugal was the number one nation in the world. But the King of Portugal didn't want to hear any new ideas; the old ideas were good enough for him. The old ideas had made him powerful and rich. The old ideas were comfortable and safe. "I don't want to take any risks," the King of Portugal said as he kicked Columbus out the door.

So, Columbus took his new idea next door to Spain. The new, young Queen listened to his new ideas. It took her a few years, but in the end, she agreed to give Columbus the chance to prove his new idea. And before anyone knew what had happened, Queen Isabella and Spain laid claim to the New World, and the mighty Portuguese Empire started to die.

Growth comes when you let new ideas stretch your mind. You and your church have to be open to some mind-stretching new ideas. That's what we've been doing here in our church. We've been stretching our minds to

find new ways to build a new church, new ways to finance a new church, new ways to expand our witness for Christ.

As we learned through experience, new ideas are threatening to many people. The truth is, most people prefer to stick with the old ideas.

I'm one of them. I like the old ways, because those familiar old ideas slip on me as easily as my old pair of slippers. They're worn and comfortable. They fit me to a "T." I've stretched them out and worn them down to my size. They conform to every peculiar contour of my thinking. They fit me exactly.

It's like going to a Chinese Restaurant. Since the first time Janet took me to a Chinese restaurant in Richmond, Virginia back in 1970, I have said it and meant it, "I love Chinese food." But the only Chinese food I would eat was Chicken Chow Mein.

"Try something new," Janet always said. "Taste something else," she always recommended. "No," I would always answer, "I'll stick with what I know I like."

Then, that day happened. Janet and I were in Toronto, Ontario for a little get-away back in 1986. We sat down in a fancy Chinese restaurant. She told me, "Don't order Chow Mein." That day I ordered shredded beef with carrots - what an explosion of flavors filled my mouth! It was a new idea, and it was a risk; but it opened up a whole new world of delicious dining.

Don't you want more out of life than just Chicken Chow Mein? Don't you want some spice, some flavor, some new and exciting tastes?

You and your church need more than a bland diet of the same old thing. The church has to be a place to grow new ideas for service, new ideas of fellowship, new ideas of witness, new ideas of study.

No matter how much you may want everything to stay the same, coming to church has to be more than a nostalgic trip into the safety of yesterday. Your church has to help you grow by confronting you with a world of new ideas that will stretch your mind.

The second way you and your church can grow is by taking on **responsibilities that stretch your will.**

What's the worst thing that can be said about a church, any church? Is it that there are no children around? Is it that the music and the singing are terrible? Is it that the minister is a rotten sermonizer and a cold-fish? Is it that the people aren't friendly?

Those are all pretty rotten things. What do you think the worst thing you can say about a church is?

I think the worst thing you can say about a church is that it's easy,

- that it doesn't make its people think,
- that it doesn't demand any decision-making,
- that it doesn't expect any thing out of its members,
- that it lets its people alone,
- that it isn't any bother at all.

Just suppose you were looking for a school to send your child to. You want your child to go to the best school possible. You pick out a school and you ask some questions.

"Is homework required," you ask. "No," the principal answers, "we want our students to enjoy themselves so we don't burden them with homework."

"What about attendance at class," you question. The reply is, "Our students are free to come and go as they desire. We want them to be free spirits."

"Are there many tests," you want to know. "We don't believe in artificial measurements of intelligence like tests," the principal responds, "around here we think grades only cause our students to be in competition with one another."

If those were the kinds of answers you got from a principal about his school, I imagine you'd send your child somewhere else. Because, you know that if a school expects so little from its students, it will give them little, and they will learn little.

Don't accept any less from your church. If our church has any hope of fulfilling its purpose, it has to challenge you with more responsibilities. It has to call you to carry out duties that stretch your will.

One of those duties is regular attendance.

You know, some people expect their religion to get them to heaven when they die, but it can't even get them to church on Sunday morning.

The first and best gift you give to God is yourself in worship. Coming to worship once a week is not an option for a Christian. Don't tell me you worship God out in nature, or in your bed on Sunday morning, or in front of the television. It's not true. You might fool yourself. You might fool your neighbor. But you don't fool me, and you don't fool God.

It is your duty to be in worship. That's central to the Christian faith.

Another duty is good stewardship.

Do you realize that in your New Testament, a full one fourth of everything Jesus said has to do with stewardship? Jesus was saying that it is really, really important to God what you do with what you've got.

Most people don't want to hear about stewardship because they know, deep down inside in their hearts, that they just don't give enough.

There are many other duties a good Christian will fulfill. Duties like serving on committees and departments. Duties like inviting people to church. Duties like praying for other people. Duties like forgiving wrongs and overlooking other people's mistakes. There are many, many Christian duties that stretch your will to be an obedient child of God.

As a child of God, what responsibility do you bare? What duty have you been shirking that you should you be performing?

The easier a church is to belong to, the less value it has.

Worship, giving, serving, witnessing - no, we're not going to publish your statistics in the newsletter for everyone to read. We won't write down how many times you come to worship, how much you give, how often you volunteer your service, how frequently you witness for Jesus. The people

who sit beside you in church will never know. I won't know your personal numbers. But God always knows.

Your church has to be a place to grow, and growing always requires ideas that stretch your mind and duties that stretch your will.

Just think about it, with all the growing you've still got ahead of you, who knows what you may yet be, what you may yet build, what you may yet do?