

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF A GODLY MAN

This is going to be an unusual format for an article, but I believe that God has placed this on my heart. On February 23, Brother Tony Machiavello went to be with the Lord. Brother Tony was my dear father-in-law, a wonderful deacon in the church here at Grace Chapel, and one of my most trusted spiritual advisors. He had a great impact on the lives of many of God's people. I am going to write about his life not for the purpose of eulogizing him, but for the purpose of drawing lessons from his life. The day before he died he called me into intensive care to plan his funeral in case this was the time the Lord was going to call for him. He gave me explicit instructions that he not be eulogized. He said that he was a sinner, and that the only one worthy of eulogy was the Lord Jesus. It is instructive for God's children to consider the lives of those who have walked with God both for encouragement and for instruction. David said in Psalm 37:37, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace." The Hebrew word translated "mark" is *shamar*. the basic idea of the root of this word is "to exercise great care over." From this root the meaning is derived of "regard, give heed to, observe." Let us mark the life of this man of God and see what we can learn that will benefit us as we run our race with patience.

The Day of His Death

The first thing I am going to do is to include the brief account I wrote on the day of his going to be with the Lord. This will give a summary of the things we will look at later. On February 23, 1997, I wrote:

A great man has fallen! My dear father-in-law, Brother Anthony C. Machiavello, a great Christian gentleman and a Spirit-filled deacon, went to be with the Lord shortly before 8 'o clock this morning. God gave him dying grace. He showed us how to live and he showed us how to die. We will miss his love and his great wisdom.

He was an avid student of the Bible and knew more of God's word than most preachers. He was born in Spain and was baptized as an infant into the Roman Catholic Church. He came to New York City when he was a young boy. He saw the errors in Roman Catholicism at an early age and went from denomination to denomination. He met my dear mother-in-law and was introduced to the Primitive Baptists. He began a deep study of theology and fell in love with the glorious doctrines of grace. He was baptized into Morris Memorial Primitive Baptist Church. He was a spiritual pioneer, and was a charter member in two PB churches, Raleigh and Grace Chapel.

He was a man who had his heart in heaven and his feet on the earth. Even in the ICU his mind was on the Scriptures most of the time. However, he was thinking about the practical needs of some of our church members, and was giving instructions as to how those needs should be met. He was cheerful and peaceful until the very end.

He did not want any eulogies at his funeral. He said that we should eulogize the Lord Jesus Christ. He

wanted his funeral to be in the church building, and wants us to serve dinner and have fellowship afterwards.

He was blessed to have twelve of his twenty-six grandchildren and all three of his children to be Christians and faithful members of Primitive Baptist churches. No doubt, many of his other grandchildren will be added to the Lord's church in the future. He and his wife, Sister Patty, went far beyond the call of duty in opening their home to God's children in a way of hospitality. On several occasions they even let people live in their home for several months when they had no other place to stay. One time they took in a Cambodian family who had fled from Communism. We had the privilege of preaching the gospel of sovereign grace to them through an interpreter.

Brother Tony was very burdened that all the church members needed to be studying their Bibles and becoming grounded in the truth. For a few months before his death he was constantly getting the church here to order outstanding religious books by sound authors and distributing them to the members.

We have suffered a great loss, but he has gone on to great gain!!!

We ask for your prayers,

Zack Guess, the family of Brother Tony Machiavello, and Grace Chapel Primitive Baptist Church

Trust in God's Sovereignty and Providence!

What is the first lesson to be learned from this life? The most important lesson that anyone can learn is to recognize the fact that God is sovereign and rules over all our lives. Who would ever have thought that this little boy, born in Spain to Roman Catholic parents, would someday be a wonderful deacon in a Primitive Baptist Church in the southern section of the United States? God picks out who He wants to know His truth and to serve Him. God has exercised His sovereign will over people's lives since the beginning of time. Many people lived in the pagan idolatry of Ur of the Chaldees, but God chose Abraham out of there and revealed Himself to him in a special way. Many ambitious Jews were zealous of the traditions of the fathers and resisted Christianity, but God chose to put His special mark on Paul and made him more zealous for Christ than He had been for Judaism. Do you love God and His truth today? If so, you need to greatly rejoice and be thankful. That did not happen by accident or because you were better than someone else. It happened because God, in His sovereign good pleasure, had mercy on you. About two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." (Matt. 11:25,26)

It would be impossible in the space we have here to trace how God brought Brother Tony to a knowledge of the truth and to His true church, but we will try to sketch a few broad outlines. The Machiavellos came from Spain to New York City when Tony was a little boy. He was devout in his

ancestral religion, but he had an inquisitive mind. By the time he had left home to join the Army Air Force during W. W. II. he had rejected the errors of Roman Catholicism and was searching for the truth. He questioned Christians of various denominations and began to seek the answers to his questions from the Bible. After he was discharged from the army, he went to Houston, Texas, to attend a watch maker's school on the G. I. Bill. In the meantime, my mother-in-law, Sister Patty, had gone to Houston from Arkansas to live with her sister and brother-in-law. She had been hired as a secretary in the watch maker's school. She and Tony met, fell in love, and were eventually married. I wish I could tell more of this story, but space does not permit. If anyone would like to get an account of this story and of many other stories of how God brought some godly husbands and wives together, order *Heirs Together in God's Wonderful Providence* from Sister Sharon Witvoet at 948 Gallaher, Kingston, TN 37763. Her phone number is (423) 376-0063.

Tony came to see his bride-to-be after she had moved back home to Arkansas and was introduced to the Primitive Baptists for the first time. How do you think a "yankee" from New York City would take to the Arkansas Primitive Baptists? He told me one time that his first impression was that they were very friendly, but that they were a little peculiar! He and his new bride lived in Memphis, Tennessee, after they were married. Patty had been reared in a Primitive Baptist atmosphere but had never joined a PB church. She loved the Lord very much. In fact, their common love for the Lord Jesus Christ was the number one factor in their loving each other. They began to attend Morris Memorial PB Church in Memphis. Patty wanted to join, but Tony held her back, because he thought the doctrines of grace were a little peculiar. He realized this was a very serious matter, and he began to study in earnest. He would take his lunch hour, walk to the main library, go to the religious section, and begin to study. This making the most of every minute characterized his entire life. The Lord showed him the truth, Brother Tony embraced it joyfully, and he and his wife were baptized and became devout followers of the Lord in His church.

Why does this story relate to you and me? If we are God's children, His hand of providence is on us as well. Tony never did believe that it was "accidental" or "coincidental" that he found his wife and his church. He always spoke of how the Lord had led him. He loved Scriptures like Jeremiah 10:23, "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps," Proverbs 16:9, "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps," and Proverbs 3:5,6 "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Christian friends, the Lord is leading His sheep. We need to do the best we can to trust Him and to follow Him as closely as we can.

Young people take heart, and wait on the godly mate that God can bring your way. The God that can get a girl from the foothills of the Ozarks and a man from Spain together for a wonderful, godly marriage, can also guide your life. Seek His face diligently. Strive to be as obedient to Him as you possibly can. Do not take matters in your own hands, but watch for His hand in your life.

Hospitality

The Machiavello home was always open to God's little children. It still is by the way. Not long ago my

dear mother-in-law entertained two families in her home who had come to Memphis for a church meeting. Brother Tony considered it one of the joys of his life to have people in his good home. On one occasion there was a family in our church who had lost their house. They wanted to stay in Memphis and continue to be members of our church, but they had no place here to live. The Machiavellos took them in and let them live with them for several months until they could be established in their own dwelling. This was not easy. True hospitality is very rarely easy, but they gladly extended a helping hand.

Brother Tony became aware that some Cambodian refugees, who had escaped certain death from the Khmer Rouge Communists, were living in appalling conditions in refugee camps in Thailand. Some of these refugees were in danger of being deported to Cambodia, where it was certain they would be executed. His compassionate heart could not rest until he had done something about this matter. He decided to sponsor a Cambodian family to come live with him. This was hard work, but it turned out to be a wonderful experience. Those Cambodians came to church at Grace Chapel. We had the unique blessing of preaching to them through an interpreter. A Cambodian wedding was held in our church building. We had the pleasure of hearing some Cambodian voices singing songs like *Amazing Grace* and *Oh, How I Love Jesus*. Brother Tony had the satisfaction of knowing that he had literally saved some lives by his practice of hospitality. Later, the family he had taken in moved to another part of the country, but they regarded him as a grandfather until his death.

He was always looking for someone to help. At one point in his life he decided to open a separate bank account which he named *The Special Account*. He would put money in the account and then pray for God to show him someone who needed help. He was a good provider, but he never spent a lot of money on himself. He was frugal, but not because he was covetous. He practiced frugality so that he would always be able to respond when someone was in need.

In this day of selfishness how we need examples of hospitality like that shown by Brother Tony and Sister Patty. It is not always easy to practice hospitality. It takes money to buy extra food. It takes a lot of work to cook and clean house. However, the blessings received from entertaining God's children in our homes far surpass the work and expense that is involved. Hebrews 13:2 tells us plainly to "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." May many of us determine that by God's grace our homes shall be hospitable refuges for God's little children. I have long loved the little plaque on the Machiavellos' front door. It says "Welcome friend, what'er betide, The kettle's on, so come inside."

Spirit-filled Deacon

One of the greatest blessings a church can have is a faithful minister. However, equally important is to have good deacons. As a pastor for over thirty years, I can testify that a good deacon cannot be valued too highly. The qualifications for the office of deacon are set forth in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Brother Tony met those qualifications. Moreover, in the account of the institution of the office of deacon in the New Testament church which is recorded in the book of Acts, there are some other qualifications mentioned which are very important. In Acts 6:3 Peter told the church, "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among

you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business." As his pastor for many years, I can truly say that Brother Tony was "full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom." He was not argumentative. He was a peace maker. He was alert. He gave sound advice. During the song service, or sometimes at the end of the preaching, our dear brother would comment on a portion of Scripture or give us a word of exhortation. His remarks were always appropriate and stimulated us to a closer walk with God. He was held in the highest regard by all our church members and by many members of other churches. When he died we knew that we had suffered a **great loss**.

What was the secret of his being filled with the Holy Ghost and with wisdom? For one thing, he constantly read and studied the Bible and good Christian literature. He had a library that was better than most preachers' libraries. He had a room on his house that he converted into a study. On the night stand beside his bed you would always find a Bible, some books, and some religious periodicals. He knew his Bible well. He was also very well versed in church history and had an intimate knowledge of Primitive Baptist church history.

He was also a man of fervent prayer. Each night he and his wife would lift up family, church, friends, the nation, and the needy before the throne of grace. On two occasions one of our ministers, Elder Bobby Poe, went to the Philippines to preach the everlasting gospel. We at Grace Chapel determined that each night he was gone, we would meet to pray. On one of the trips Brother Bobby was gone for about sixty days. Brother Tony did not miss a single one of those prayer meetings! For over ten years, several of the men here at Grace Chapel have met early one morning of each week to pray that God would send revival to His people. Brother Tony was a regular attendant at these prayer meetings. On the Tuesday morning before his death on the following Sunday, he was at that meeting, even though it was obvious that he did not feel well.

It is not easy to be Spirit-filled. That is why there are not more spirit-filled church members. However, if our churches are ever going to prosper spiritually, we must have spirit-filled members. It is especially important the the leaders of the churches be constantly filled with the Holy Spirit. I pray that many who read this will be stirred up to follow the example of Brother Tony in this regard. If you want to be this way, you have got to do it the same way he did. You must constantly read and study the word of God. You must be diligent in prayer. You must not have so many outside interests that they drain away the energy you need to put into spiritual pursuits.

As I said above, however, in the message I wrote on the day of his death, he had "his heart in heaven and his feet on the earth." He was a very spiritual man, but he was also a very practical man. These two qualities should always go together. As a deacon, he was always aware of the needs of church members. He was kind of like a spiritual "detective." Sometimes when people had needs they were reluctant to make them known. Brother Tony was very observant and seemed to almost have a "sixth sense" in finding those who needed help. We desperately need more of that compassion and "sanctified common sense" in our churches today.

Family Patriarch

There is something beautiful and comforting to read about the influence that godly men like Abraham had on their immediate and extended families. Those old patriarchs exemplified manhood in the true sense of that term. They demonstrated integrity, moral strength, and other qualities which are so lacking today. They led their families both by precept and example. As they lived long lives and were consistently godly, they gained more and more respect from those who were closest to them. They not only knew the word of God-they practiced it. Speaking of such men who had grown old in the service of the Lord, Proverbs 16:31 says, "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." This verse describes Brother Tony.

He was kind but firm. His children and grandchildren both loved and respected him. He was fun-loving, but not foolish. He was essentially a serious minded man. His grandchildren loved to go to his house, but they knew that they had to behave while they were there. He always led in family worship; he did not delegate that responsibility to someone else. He might call on others to participate, but he was in charge. When he had visitors he would often pass the song books out and have a few songs of praise, some Scripture reading, and a word of prayer before they had to leave.

The main event of the year that this patriarch presided over was Thanksgiving. This was by far our favorite family holiday. All the children and grandchildren went to great lengths to be there. Tony and Patty would plan for this event for weeks. They would buy and prepare food. The children would get up a program of singing, recitations, and other activities. When we sat down to the bountiful Thanksgiving meal, Brother Tony always had a short, appropriate speech to give us. He reminded us of God's blessings and of our responsibilities to serve such a wonderful Lord. As food was being passed around, each family member in turn was asked to relate some of the Lord's blessings in their lives during the past year. On Thanksgiving night, church members and friends would join the family and we would have a joyful time of singing praises and testifying to the goodness of God. This old patriarch and his faithful wife have given us precious memories that we will carry throughout our lives. What strength and stability such memories give to us.

Retirement and Last Years

Brother Tony was a very hard worker. He was tops in his trade of watch maker and jeweler. He was constantly upgrading his professional skills. He was a very diligent and valued employee. He always went in to work even when he did not feel like it. For most of his work career he had to work very long hours. A few years before his death, he was blessed to retire from his job. However, he did not really retire as that term is usually used. He was very aware of the shortness of life. He wanted to do as much as he could for the advancement of the kingdom of God, before he was called out of this world. He once remarked to me that he was so busy he didn't see how he had ever had time to work at a regular job!

He was almost constantly working, both manually and mentally. If there happened to be a building or repair task being done on the church building or on one of the members' homes, he was always there. Even though he was very ill, he was doing a remodeling job on the pastor's study the Monday night before his death the following Sunday.

Mentally and spiritually he was also always at work. He always had Bible study projects. He wrote on church history and on Scriptural subjects. He wrote a narrative of the life of Christ, and was working on a summary history of the life of Paul when he died.

When our church got involved in spreading the gospel to the Philippines, he was in the forefront of the work. He was constantly praying, raising money, and packing clothes and books to send to the Filipinos. He never lost his enthusiasm for the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ. Brother Tony's last years have been very well described in Psalm 92:13,14, where it is said that "Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing."

To use a Scripture that was used at the beginning of this article, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace."

His Death

The good Lord greatly blessed Brother Tony in life and He blessed him in death. He only missed one church service, a Wednesday night. On the Sunday night before his death, he participated in the Lord's Supper. One of his grandsons had been forced to miss that service by circumstances over which he had no control. He was depressed because of this and got to church just as the service was drawing to a close. Brother Tony spotted him, got a pan of water, and washed his grandson's feet. That made a profound impression on that young man.

Brother Tony entered the hospital on Wednesday morning. From then until his death on Sunday morning, he had constant spiritual activity. All of his children and many of his grandchildren were able to visit with him. They had many significant conversations. Many ministers came to see him. One of his favorites was Brother James Rushing, who has had a terrible bout with cancer. Brother Tony asked him for a sermon and Brother James was greatly blessed to expound the word of God to him right there in Intensive Care.

Brother Tony refused to have the television turned on because he said he did not want anything to interfere with his meditations. The day before he died he called his pastor in and planned his funeral. Several hours before he died, while talking with some of his children and grandchildren, he told them that he was willing to stay a while longer, but that there was a much better place awaiting him. He charged one of his grandsons to be sure to get him a tape of the Sunday morning service. He had his final conversation with another of his grandsons. He spoke of spiritual matters and was thinking about Psalm 103. This grandson left and in a few minutes Brother Tony Machiavello was in the blessed presence of his Lord and Savior!

Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!

