



"Faults and defects every work of man must have."  
—Samuel Johnson

**03-Aug-07**

## **A Bridge Too Frail**

In the murky waters of the Mississippi River, as it flows through Minneapolis, Minnesota, divers are still searching through the rubble for the bodies of the missing and presumed dead as a result of the I-35W bridge collapse on Wednesday evening. The forty-year-old bridge, part of an eight-lane interstate freeway running through the heart of the city, carried 141,000 vehicles a day. When the central section collapsed during rush hour, the whole concrete and steel structure—plus dozens of idling vehicles—plunged about sixty feet into the river. Adjacent bridge sections immediately crumpled onto both riverbanks.

As might be expected, early reports cast far afield to ascertain the cause of the collapse. The federal Homeland Security Department ruled out terrorism almost immediately, focusing attention on the bridge itself, which had been under repair for resurfacing when disaster struck. Soon, it was reported that the bridge was unusual for one of its length in that it had no supports under its central span, it having been determined by early planners that piers would obstruct river traffic. While the design worked successfully for four decades, it was ultimately flawed.

In the nearly two days since, heavy attention has been given to the fact that the National Transportation Safety Board confirmed that the bridge, Minnesota's busiest, had been given the "structurally deficient" rating in 1990. While this does not suggest that it was on the verge of immediate collapse, it does mean that serious, potential safety issues needed to be analyzed and addressed. When cracks and corrosion in the steel understructure were found in the years following, inspections were moved up in 1993 to be done on a yearly basis rather than every two years, and since that time, inspectors have suggested various repairs and reinforcement strategies. Yet, rather than add steel plates to buttress the cracked areas, the state chose only to make a thorough inspection. The bridge was not a candidate for replacement until 2020.

In a Friday, August 3, 2007, article, "First Alarm About Bridge Raised in 1990," the Associated Press reports, "More than 70,000 bridges across the country are rated structurally deficient like the I-35W bridge, and engineers estimate repairing them all would take at least a generation and cost more than \$188 billion." As in the case of the I-35W bridge, the deteriorating condition of the nation's bridges has been an open secret for a few decades, but few states are eager to tackle the problem because of the huge cost of rebuilding. While most of these bridges still have some life expectancy, how many of them are just a major vibration or a slightly increased traffic load away from collapse? Such a thing is impossible to know. State inspectors all across this country are scrambling to inspect every "structurally deficient" bridge in their jurisdictions—just in case.

This tragedy—which, by all accounts, could have been far more deadly—points out just how important the underlying structure is to an edifice. We usually see only the façade of a building, an arena, a tunnel, or a bridge, and rarely do we even think about things like footings, piles, rebar, beams, girders, ties, welds, bolts, rivets, and such. Yet, a crack or two, corrosion, inferior materials, shoddy construction, slippage, settling, or erosion, and despite how massive a thing might seem, it can all fall down in the blink of an eye.

[God](#), through the apostle Paul, calls on [Christians](#), not only to inspect their spiritual condition on a regular basis, but also to run tests on how well they

are performing: "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the [faith](#). Test yourselves" ([II Corinthians 13:5](#)). Among other things, his point is that we should go farther in our self-inspection than merely looking at ourselves. We can, and should, do this frequently, of course, but we can do it in a slapdash or self-justifying way—and we come out of it smelling like the proverbial rose every time! Paul wants us to go deeper than examining the façade; he commands us to determine if we actually *function* according to what we profess to believe.

In a practical sense, this means that our self-evaluation is not a snapshot of our spirituality at a given moment, but to continue the metaphor, a reel or two of our activity over a given period. It is as if we were watching a movie, "This Is Your Life!" and it is our job to rate how well we applied the [teachings of Jesus Christ](#) and the apostles and prophets as our daily walk was documented on film. Alternatively, think of it as a spiritual reality show. Would the Judge boot us from "Who Is a Real Christian?" or would we survive to the next episode? Do we have what it takes to win the fabulous prize in the finale?

Obviously, if we fail the self-evaluation, God gives us time to make repairs and return to service. But it is certain that no true Christian ever wants to be found "structurally deficient." The apostle Peter gives us a formula to avoid such an evaluation:

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge [self-control](#), to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly [kindness](#), and to brotherly kindness [love](#). For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord [Jesus Christ](#). For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. ([II Peter 1:5-11](#))

A regular schedule of inspection, maintenance, testing, and repair is just what we need to avoid spiritual collapse.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[Checklist for Overcoming](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The church of God has a problem with empty externalism (accompanied by no inward change), a problem which led to its scattering. All of us, individually and collectively, were responsible for its demise. God has promised to hear our prayers if we humble ourselves and turn from our sins. Having the right doctrines is of no avail unless they are acted upon. After our conversion, our minds become a perpetual battleground against our prideful human nature, requiring that we sacrifice and humble ourselves in God's service. Romans 12-16 provide a checklist for overcoming and promoting positive relationships, developing tender affection toward one another. We must realize that we are mutually dependent upon one another, and that God has given gifts so that all may benefit or profit.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Faith to Face Our Trials](#)**

by Pat Higgins

Life sometimes seems to be one trial after another. However, Pat Higgins asserts that God has revealed an astounding facet of our relationship with Him that should give us the faith to soldier on despite our many trials.

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